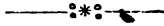


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AT BAY

High up on a crag overlooking the winding road, David Flint raised the rifle and lodged it across the rocky crest. He had dulled the sleek steel of the barrel to prevent any tell-tale flashes from the sun; his face was shaded by the tweed cap pulled down to his eyes and the coat collar up around his ears. All that connected him with the man in the car, a hundred yards down below, were the hairlines which crossed the telescopic sight now quartering his victim's chest.

He was about to kill a man in cold blood. His mission had begun innocuously enough with a boring job in the invoice department of a London export company. That he had been inveigled into the job had never occurred to him until the Chairman had sent for him and made this fantastic proposition. Knelle had to be liquidated for his heinous offences during the war. David had served in the Commandos and the Special Air Service. For £10,000 he was to murder this German doctor for his crimes against humanity in general and, in particular, against the Chairman's son.

David had refused the proposal, but circumstances had eventually changed his mind. He had travelled to Cyprus in search of his elusive victim—but he had not reckoned on the complications which followed.

This tense thriller is the third novel by the man who won the Macmillan Centenary Award for the best novel submitted by a member of the Services. Its circumstantial realism comes from wartime operations but its gripping tension and invention are the result of the keenly imaginative mind which produced the prize-winning *Desert Episode*.

Also by George Greenfield

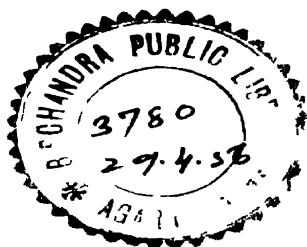
THIS WORLD IS WIDE ENOUGH

DESERT EPISODE

AT BAY

by

GEORGE GREENFIELD



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PART I

SIGHTING SHOT

HE HAD to crawl the last few yards. Left arm forward and right leg bent; a quick heave. Then right arm forward and left leg bent; heave again. His body scissored up the rough incline but always with back and buttocks close to the ground, in the way he had learned in the war.

He was near the top of the slope now and he paused. Gently, almost gingerly, he slid the rifle on its side, bolt uppermost, across the crest, a few inches at a time, close to the stunted bush that would give him cover. He had dulled the sleek steel of the barrel by running a match flame along it. He wanted no tell-tale flashes from the bright sun, already high over the crags near Buffavento. Slowly he hunched his head and shoulders forward, pressing close against the withered bush. His old tweed cap was down over his eyes and his coat collar up round his ears. Experience in war had taught the lesson that a white face shows up clearly against a dark background. The war was long over but his purpose today was the same as in those far-off days. With exquisite care he was making ready to kill a man.

Now he could peer down from the mountainside and see the Kyrenia road spinning and swooping from the height of the pass down towards the village. On either side were plantations of grey-green olive trees and the road bobbed and twisted between them like a shining thread. A glance at his watch showed that he had at least ten minutes to wait. Methodically he swept the countryside,

making sure that there were no unconscious spectators of the shooting that was to come in so short a time. His gaze took in the rearing crags of Buffavento and the dark patch below them that he knew was the monastery of Bellapaise. Swinging his head northwards he could see the groves of olive trees, dusty grey in the sunlight, and beyond them the sea, so blue and calm. On the misty horizon a soft smudge was Turkey, the only Middle Eastern country he had never visited. One day perhaps he would go there—if all went well in a few minutes. He wrenched himself back to the present and craned to the left. He could just see the white houses of Kyrenia three miles away and the bulk of the castle squatting at the water's edge. Further left the Dome Hotel showed black against the silky blue of the sea. At this moment the car would be at the hotel entrance, the car that would bring the victim into range. He did not want to think about it just yet.

To his left and not half a mile behind him, the ruined castle of St. Hilarion thrust up into the pale sky. Someone had told him that Richard the Lion-Heart's bride had been captured and imprisoned there. Richard had laid siege to the castle and finally the garrison had been starved into surrender. Isaac, who owned the castle and who had seized the girl, agreed to surrender if Richard swore not to bind him with chains of iron. Richard swore the solemn oath but once Isaac was delivered into his hands bound him with chains of gold. Isaac eventually died a prisoner, still with those golden chains heaped on him, dragging him to the grave. They were tough, those old Crusaders, tough and ruthless. He wondered idly whether human nature had changed. He would soon find out.

Five minutes to go and for the last time he rehearsed the plan in his mind. It was very simple. He had remembered from the war days that only the simple plan ever worked

out well. The car would leave Kyrenia at ten o'clock. He would be able to see it climbing the winding road up to the pass. A hundred yards below where he lay, the road jinked almost at right angles and for thirty yards ran straight in his direction. Then it swung off, out of view, at another sharp angle. It was steep and narrow in that short stretch and every car had to slow down to negotiate first one bend, then the second. At fifteen miles an hour the car he waited for would take just under four seconds to cover the straight stretch and even now his rifle was pointing down the road. Four seconds in which to aim, take first pressure and fire. Long enough when you were a good shot and knew exactly where and when the target would appear. The road was so narrow and a car taking that first bend had to swing so wide that it must follow one course within a foot or two either way. It was also too narrow to allow another car, coming from the opposite direction, to pass and thus block his view and his shot at the crucial moment. He knew; he had worked it all out. His victim—'target' was a better word—would be sitting in the front beside the driver. He might as well be riding on tramlines, so surely would he come into the line of fire.

The watcher was wearing thin cotton gloves. He eased back the bolt of the rifle and then pushed it forward, sliding the one round in the magazine up into the breech. He pressed back the safety catch. It was a one-shot job—hit or miss and no repeats. Four seconds was not long enough to aim, fire, re-aim and fire again. If the first shot missed, that was that. But the first would not miss. The range was too short, himself too good a shot to be able to miss. He flexed his fingers and wriggled lower against the ground. This waiting was hell.

• Once more he rehearsed the rest of the plan. One shot—and then he would slide off down the slope under cover.

Twenty yards back there was a crevice in the mountain-side, a natural fault that had cracked the rock. The gap was a few inches wide and sheer for a hundred feet at least. He had let down that length of cord and the end had touched nothing. The rifle would go straight down that crack and would never be fished up. No weapon, less chance of tracing the one who fired the shot. Besides, he was wearing gloves; there would be no betraying fingerprints, even if the rifle were ever found.

Then he would race westwards, keeping below the crest of the ridge. He had reconnoitred the mountains and knew of a trackless route across the scrub and the rocky outcrop on the landward side. He could duck in and out of gullies, under cover most of the way. There were no houses within three miles and no grazing, even for goats, on the barren uplands. No one would come close enough to be able to describe or recognize him. An hour's forced march and he would cross the ridge and race down the mountainside towards that lonely bay between Kyrenia and Lapithos where he had already left a picnic lunch, a towel and swimming trunks. There he would subbathe and swim, only returning to Kyrenia towards evening. No one would connect him with the shooting. Why should they? There was no apparent motive. Even if he were vaguely suspected, no one would believe that he could have covered more than five miles across the mountains in under an hour and a half. He had never posed as an athlete.

Three minutes to go. Already the car would have started on its journey, climbing up the steep road out of Kyrenia. The man in the passenger's seat was approaching his unknown rendezvous at a steady twenty-five to thirty miles an hour. The watcher on the hillside mentally urged him on, willing him to hurry and place himself between the crossed hairs of the telescopic sight. This hanging about

was always the worst part of war, he remembered, and those lurking memories came leaping back into his mind, that hour before the dawn when the coast of Italy had been only a black streak against a hardly paler sky, that moment before H-hour when the belly felt slack, and empty and nausea soured the throat. In those days he had been as much in danger as the enemy, more so perhaps. Today it was the quarry who was in deadly danger. But still the old feeling persisted and he found himself unconsciously falling into the remembered trick of feeling his pulse, to see whether the heart-beats reflected his rising excitement. He had done so, he recalled, before the Anzio landing and just as the first wave went in on Sicily. Almost clinically, as though he were taking the pulse of another man, he noticed that the heart-beats were unhurried and regular, not reflecting his inner turmoil. A good sign, he thought. A straight shot needed a steady hand.

And now, perhaps a mile away, he saw a flash of light between the olive trees. It was the sun reflected on the roof of the closed car. There was an open space and for a moment he saw it, climbing towards him like an industrious black beetle. Not long now. Suddenly the indeterminate background noises broke their harmony, so that he seemed to hear each one individually. Nearby a cicada was rasping out its creaking monotone. Several hundred feet away he could hear the faint bleating of goats and the sad notes of country-pipes which the goatherd was playing. He could only just hear the pipes but the notes seemed to hang on the still air and then vanish, like little bubbles of sound. Luckily for him the rocky shelf on which he was lying overhung the valley so that the goatherd and his flock were well out of sight. The goatherd might hear the shot but he would never see the marksman.

Just then, with a clatter, a local red bus, crammed with

Cypriots, swung round the bend, lurched and skidded down the road and disappeared in the direction of Kyrenia. His hands had tensed on the rifle and he relaxed, expelling his breath in a long sigh. He was getting jumpy, he thought, but at the same time he was glad that the bus had come and gone. A few moments later and it would have been inconveniently close to the scene when the shot was fired. He had begun to sweat, lying half-exposed to the hot sun. A trickle of sweat ran down his forehead and soaked into his left eyebrow. Cautiously he eased up his cap and wiped his brow with the back of a gloved hand. He could not afford to have his right eye blurred at this particular moment.

And now the car was very close. He saw it a quarter of a mile away, climbing steadily nearer him. He hunched down, slid the safety catch forward and slowly settled the butt into his shoulder. He eased himself into a more comfortable position and peered through the telescopic sight. The straight stretch of road seemed to jump closer. On one edge of the bend he could pick out the rust-red stain on the rocky wall where a trickle of water had marked the stone in wintertime. Now he could hear the faint drumming of the car's engine as it approached him, although hidden by the crest of the hill. He felt cold and still and he frowned in concentration. He held his breath.

Here it was. It suddenly emerged round the bend and appeared to stop short, like a motion picture that has jammed. He shifted the rifle a fraction until the crossed hairs of the sight quartered the passenger's chest. The passenger was looking straight ahead, his eyes seemed to be staring right at the hidden marksman. There was that customary diffident smile twisting one corner of his lips, full lips for such a seemingly ascetic face. The marksman gently squeezed the trigger and felt first pressure. The

world might have stopped in its tracks. There was only himself and the man in the car a hundred yards away. All that connected them was a piece of magnifying glass and the hair-lines which crossed on the target's chest. Slowly and steadily the marksman closed his forefinger on the snug trigger. Another slight fraction of a squeeze and the bullet would be on its way.

And then suddenly the flock of goats emptied across the road, milling and shoving around the bonnet of the car. The goatherd, a boy in baggy black trousers and high boots, leapt after them, banging his stick on the ground. The Cypriot driver leaned out of the car, shaking his fist and shouting. The boy paused to throw a return oath, pushing and beating his scraggy goats off the road. The car crept forward, nudging the late-comers of the flock out of the way, and then it disappeared up the road to Nicosia.

The watcher on the hillside cursed. He could not, he told himself, have risked a shot in all that confusion. His hands were trembling as he lowered the rifle and he lay limply, his head resting against the stock. He felt drained of vitality. The keyed-up tension had left him as slack as a piece of wet string. To have engineered the encounter up to the vital last second, to have been on the very point of firing and then to have lost the chance through a sheer freak of luck. It was cruel. Cruel, he repeated to himself, and under his breath added every obscene word he knew, muttering them over and over again. He ground the toe of his right boot against the rocky path, as though he were grinding it into the face of his enemy.

The black mood passed. He rose cautiously to his feet and, tucking the rifle under his arm, walked slowly back along the mountain-edge. He felt weak and his knees gave under his accustomed weight. He was still angry at the lost opportunity but he realized that he was driving

himself to anger, forcing the mood to stay. There would be another chance, he told himself, and next time no bloody goats would get between him and the target. But, underneath it all, he knew for the moment that he was secretly glad. He had not yet killed in cold blood.

PART II

PROPOSITION

(i)

IT WAS a wet day in March 1948. Outside the lighted windows of the head office of Eximport Limited the sky was slate-grey, splashed with the greenish glare of the neon street-lighting. The rain was whispering on the walls and the pavements, in steady inevitable spikes that never seemed likely to stop. The frosted glass windows prevented the staff of Eximport Limited from seeing the traffic and the passers-by; they were expected to concentrate on their work and the windows were obscured in case the flesh might prove weak. But they could hear the muted clatter of feet, the mutter of London's traffic through the City streets and the eternal whispering of the rain.

David Flint sat at one of the twenty or so tables in the large ground-floor office. Each group of tables had a wooden barrier cutting it off from the next; in case, it was rumoured, gossiping broke out and interfered with the work. The arrangement of barriers was such that at a quick glance they looked like the pews of a church. The similarity was reinforced by the attitude of the working clerks with their heads bowed over their tables. There was no talking except to answer the telephone briefly or to ask for a ledger on someone else's table. Only the steady rapping of typewriters in various parts of the room vied with the patter of the rain outside.

David Flint was checking invoices. There was a pile of them, perhaps six inches high, on his left. Mechanically

he lifted off the top sheet from the pile, ran his pencil down the column of figures, added the total and, if it were correct, scribbled his initials across the dotted line which followed the legend 'Checked by'. He then placed the passed invoice face down on an open folder on his right. Periodically an office-boy would come clattering up, either to bring a fresh pile of unchecked invoices or else to remove the folder of those that had been passed. A red-covered ready reckoner lay on the table immediately in front of him in case there were calculations he could not do in his head. But he rarely needed to use it. After five months from nine o'clock to quarter to six with an hour's break for lunch, he had become proficient in multiplying in his head such items as '12 sets china crockery Doulton pattern at 31/6 per set' or '25 cases citrus fruit assorted at £3-2-8 per case'. For Eximport Limited seemed to deal in any commodity from grand pianos to a bag of nails. He had read the addresses on top of the invoices consigning goods to the Company's branches at faraway, romantic-sounding places like Tobago, Sierra Leone, Nicosia, Beirut and Casablanca and Los Angeles. He knew that the Company had tentacles that stretched over much of the globe, sending out goods from Britain and taking in goods in return, that sometimes were re-exported once more. Export and import—the systole-diastole that kept the heart of commerce pumping.

Early on in his job he had seen the romantic side of the business, had imagined himself standing on the quayside of some sun-drenched port with the blue sea lapping at the harbour wall, the white houses behind him and the clumps of scarlet bougainvillæa. But now these picturesque places had become just destinations for assorted items of goods, neatly typed beneath each other with figures in margins and pencil-ticked totals and unending initials on dotted lines. 'D. F.' he scribbled on the next invoice and,

without looking up, dropped it face down on the folder. 'D. F.'—it should have been 'B. F.', he thought. Here he was, stuck in a dreary office doing a dreary job for the next two years at least.

He swore a little under his breath, quietly cursing the day he had taken on the job. It had all seemed so easy beforehand. There had been that drinking acquaintance, a pleasant fellow named Summers, who frequented the same Draywater pub. He had shown David the advertisement in *The Times* and had said it was a fine firm and a grand opportunity for an ex-Army man to get on. He pointed to the advertisement which said that ex-Army officers would be given preference. David could almost quote the enticing phrases verbatim. 'Leading London export-import firm has vacancies for staff trainees. Excellent prospects and opportunities, overseas travel for selected candidates who should be single, under 30 years of age and educated up to matric standard. Preference given to ex-officers. Write in confidence with full details to Box No. —.' Summers had urged him to apply. 'Can't do any harm, old boy,' he had said. 'See that—excellent prospects, overseas travel. Just your line of country, I'd say. It's a damn' fine firm too. After all, your gratuity must be wearing a bit thin by now. Let's have another one. Same again, miss, please.'

Summers was right, of course. Demobilized in the summer of 1907, having stayed on for a time until the 'bull' and the blanco-ing of renewed peacetime intruded more and more into the Army, David had been living on the small capital of his gratuity. It didn't go far when a man had leisure all day and had to keep dipping his hand into his pocket. He had known that sooner rather than later he would have to look for a job in earnest—and he had no qualifications. He had been eighteen in 1909 and had left school to go straight into the Army. Six years of

war and two of peacetime soldiering had left him with expensive tastes and no special aptitude for civilian work. And so he had taken Summers's advice and had applied for one of the vacancies in Eximport Limited. He had been interviewed a fortnight later by the Personnel Manager, had shaken hands briefly with the Managing Director and had started work a week afterwards. At the interview he had been told that, if successful he would have to spend up to two and a half years inside head office, getting a grasp of the work of each department. If found suitable, he would then be eligible for a sub-managership in an overseas branch. He had accepted the idea philosophically, looking on it as the civilian equivalent of going through the ranks before being commissioned. But never had he visualized the dull monotony that had followed, eight and three-quarter hours a day, less an hour off for lunch, checking innumerable invoices that arrived on his desk in an unending flow.

David glanced up at the clock. A quarter to four. In half an hour's time the staff would be allowed a ten minutes' break. Just time enough to dash into the canteen across the street, gulp down a hot cup of indeterminate brown liquid that might be either tea or coffee, and smoke a cigarette in quick pulls, perhaps two cigarettes if he lit one the moment he left the office swing-doors and stubbed out the next as he re-entered the place. For smoking was not permitted during worktime. Even now, half an hour before the break, he was aching for a cigarette. He ran his tongue round dry lips and could feel the taste-buds of his tongue groping for the deadening impact of tobacco-smoke. There had always been time for a smoke in the Army. Men had even fought with a cigarette between their lips. But not in this soulless dump, he thought savagely. Lighting a cigarette might waste a few precious seconds of Eximport's valuable time and might even

carve a few pence off the fantastic profits shown each year.

One of the senior clerks, a fat, self-important fellow named Howe, had told him that the Company had made just under a million pounds net profit last year. A million pounds. He mouthed the figures silently, running them mentally round his tongue as though they were the last drops of an ancient brandy. *A million pounds.* In the tropics hundreds of men were sweating at producing, packing and despatching the goods, and here in London he and dozens of other clerks were typing or checking for all they were worth, fighting and shoving on the Underground in the morning rush-hour, queueing up in chain-restaurants at lunchtime for stale, heated-up food and fighting to get back to their lodgings in the evening rush-hour, week in, week out, just so that an anonymous Board of Directors and anonymous shareholders could divide up their million pounds every year. And probably none of the lucky ones had the slightest knowledge or wish to use their profits to any advantage. He pictured the anonymous shareholder, too fat, too old, too short of breath and stiff in the joints to enjoy spending money. A man seemed fated to use up his youth and energy making it, only to find that he had then lost the zest to spend it. So he died and a rapacious Chancellor took it away from his relatives in death duties.

David jerked back to his invoice-checking and for the next ten minutes concentrated all his mental energy on the flimsy bits of paper in front of him. The tea-break was creeping nearer and that would help to split up the rest of the afternoon. There would be under an hour left, time enough to check between fifty and a hundred more of this never-ending stream of invoices. Then his time would be his own, until nine o'clock tomorrow morning. There was quite a good film on at the local Odeon, he had heard.

He might go to it or drop in at the pub for a few drinks. His wages as a trainee left little enough for drinks or film-going after P.A.Y.E. had been deducted and lodgings, lunches and fares allowed for. Still, tonight he felt like celebrating, though God alone knew what he had to celebrate.

He glanced up at the clock on the wall and saw that Howe, the senior clerk, was strutting in his direction, with the fussy gait of the short-legged fat man. He was carrying a card in his hand and, obviously bursting with some important news, looked a cross between a stage butler and a confidential agent.

'Flint,' he said, panting a little, 'this is for you.'

David took the card and read the typed message. '*Mr. D. Flint will report to the Chairman in his office at 4.30 p.m. today, Tuesday 24th March.*' It was signed by the Personal Secretary to the Chairman of Eximport Limited.

'The Chairman,' he said. 'What does he want me for?'

'Perhaps you've been a naughty boy lately,' Howe suggested archly.

'No naughtier than usual. Anyway, if it was the ~~desk~~, the Personnel Manager would want to see me.'

'That's right,' said Howe. 'I can't imagine the Chairman'—every time he mentioned the word it was in a reverent tone, rather like the devout addressing the Deity—'wasting time over sacking a junior clerk.'

'Perhaps it's promotion,' David said and watched a dull red tinge appear in Howe's cheeks.

'Hardly likely, I'm afraid,' Howe replied stiffly. 'Well, we can't go on chattering all day long. I at least have work to do.' He turned away and strutted down the aisle to his desk.

David returned to his invoices but his mind was far away. He wondered why the Chairman should want to see him. He could think of no misdemeanour that would

warrant a command appearance. If he were to be sacked for some fault which he had momentarily forgotten, there would be a curtly worded slip in his pay-packet at the end of the week. Even for some grave error, it was more likely, as he had pointed out to Horie, that the Personnel Manager would send for him and sack him. Why, then, should the Chairman want to see him? There was no reason why he, of all the many clerks toiling away for Export Limited, should be singled out for promotion. His work was indistinguishable from theirs and he was no more ardent or adept at the job than any of them. Less so, perhaps, because he knew that his was not a nature that took kindly to a dull routine job. And again, if it were promotion by some incredible chance, the Chairman of the Company would not bother to make an appointment merely to let a junior clerk know that he was to become slightly more senior. It could not be that his two and a half years' apprenticeship was suddenly to be cut short and that he would be offered an overseas sub-managership. David had grown cynical about the prospect ahead and now looked on the enticing phrases of the advertisement as so much honey to catch the unsuspecting drone. In fact, had any more suitable job elsewhere appeared in the offing, David would quickly have handed in his notice and not waited for the inevitable flare-up that would one day cause him to lose his present job.

And yet he was strangely excited at the thought of meeting that fabulous unseen creature, the Chairman, in less than an hour's time. He knew the vague outlines of the office gossip, of how it was rumoured that, forty years ago, Daniel Sterner had been pushing a barrow near the Aldgate Pump. Of how he had bought a tiny green-grocer's shop somewhere in the East End; and when that one prospered, another and yet another until he had a

chain of them. Then, between the wars he had decided to cut out the wholesale importers and opened up his overseas branches. One thing had led to another, dry goods, cutlery, china, machinery; post-war shortages had forced up demand and prices so that today Daniel Sterner was a millionaire and more. He never appeared before his staff. David had once caught a glimpse of him when his Rolls-Bentley slid to a halt outside the office and the impassive chauffeur held open the car door. David recalled a pair of dark eyes and the opulent wisp of a fragrant cigar. He thought of a small figure huddled in the back seat of a large car but, apart from the outward signs of wealth and power, he could not think what differentiated this small man from all those others who started with nothing and ended with nothing. Turning back to his invoices, he thought that he might soon find out.

(ii)

Half an hour later he was sitting in a soft armchair in the ante-room next to the Chairman's private office. He realized that, strangely, he was not feeling nervous or excited but only curious and mildly interested to know why he had been summoned. He had never penetrated the inner sanctum before and he looked around him. The room was quietly, almost impersonally, furnished, but with obvious luxury. The fitted pale-green carpet had a deep pile in which one seemed to sink almost up to the ankles. The desk behind which the Chairman's Personal Secretary sat was undoubtedly an antique and the dark mahogany glowed with constant polishing. There was a battery of telephones on the desk and a square inter-communication receiver with various knobs. Miss Gathers, the Personal Secretary—he had already known her name but had never seen her before—was a tall, large-boned

woman in her forties. She smiled at David and indicated a pile of magazines on a side-table near his chair. He noticed that she moved quickly and deftly for a woman of her size and there seemed to be an air of precision about all her movements. Miss Gathers wore a severely cut costume but even his inexperienced eye realized that it was not an off-the-peg outfit. The single row of pearls around her strong neck looked real to him. Someone was apparently doing well out of Eximpt Limited, even if it were not David Flint.

Just then the intercommunication receiver buzzed and Miss Gathers flicked up a switch. A crackling voice said a few words. She answered, 'Yes, Mr. Sterner,' and then dropped the switch. She stood up and said, 'The Chairman will see you now, Mr. Flint.' As he rose she walked over to a door, tapped softly and opened it, standing back as she announced, 'Mr. Flint.' He walked past her, smiled his thanks and closed the door behind him. By its weight and the green baize edging he guessed it was sound-proof.

He had an impression of immense luxury. The walls were of carved panelling. A cut-glass chandelier glittered from the centre of the ceiling. Behind the vast desk at the far end of the room the curtains were a rich, plum-coloured velvet and hung in statuesque folds. But all his attention was now taken up by the short, bird-like man who stood up behind the desk and skirted it quickly, to approach with his right hand outstretched.

'Mr. Flint? How do you do? Please sit down, won't you?' The Chairman indicated an opulent armchair between the desk and the softly crackling fire. David moved towards it and waited until the Chairman resumed his seat before sinking back into the padded chair. Although he tried to sit upright, the deep, insidious chair defeated him. Mr. Sterner was sitting half-forward as he leaned across the massive desk.

'A cigarette?' he asked. 'You'll find some in that box.' He indicated a square gold box on the corner of the desk near David. 'There's a lighter attached to the box.'

David rose to reach the box. Fortunately, he thought, his stomach, and back muscles were still quite good. Otherwise he might have been a prisoner for life in the floating comfort of the deep armchair.

As though divining his thoughts, Mr. Sterner smiled, a fleeting smile that broke up the concentrated seriousness in his aquiline nose and eyes. 'I'm sorry about the chair,' he said. 'Years ago I learned the psychological advantage of placing my business opponents in a low chair from which it would be difficult to move quickly. It makes them confused and a confused rival is easier to overcome.' He smiled again. 'But, unlike most of my associates, your muscles aren't fattened by too much rich food, I see.'

David lit the cigarette and wondered what all this was leading to. Here was the Chairman, a man of power and wealth, being especially charming to one of his most junior employees. There must be a catch in it somewhere.

Again Mr. Sterner seemed to be reading his thoughts. 'You must be wondering why I sent—why I asked you to call on me,' he said. He spoke quietly with no trace of an accent but the controlled power in him seemed all the more impressive through his lack of noise. 'I will come to that presently but first I would like to have a general chat, so that we can get to know each other better.'

He slid a sheaf of papers forward on his desk and quickly adjusted a pair of horn-rimmed pince-nez which made him look more bird-like than ever. After glancing at the papers, he began to ask David questions, about his parentage, his relations, his schooling. In a short time he had established that his father had been an Indian Civil Servant who had been killed in a car-crash, together with his wife, when David was a boy of twelve. He was an only

son and so became the legal ward of the uncle with whom he had spent the holidays when his parents were in India. The uncle had been killed by a flying-bomb in 1944 so that David had been left alone in the world, apart from one or two vague relations in the Midlands whom he had not seen or corresponded with for years. As the questioning proceeded gently but inexorably, he had the growing impression that it was more to check off facts already known than to acquire new information.

David still wondered what this was leading up to. Never slow-tempered, he would normally have wanted to know what the hell business it was of a stranger asking such personal questions but Mr. Sterner's suave tact and friendliness, coupled with his air of quiet assurance, robbed the interrogation of all offensiveness. The thought flashed through his mind that perhaps Mr. Sterner had discovered that he, David, was heir to some big fortune, unknown to himself, and wanted him to invest it in the business! But that was crazy. Still, the whole affair was crazy. Of what interest could it be to this rich man to know the personal background of a junior employee?

Mr. Sterner went on with his questions. 'Let me see now, you were born in 1901, I think you told me?'

David nodded.

'Then you must have left school just before the war began?'

'Yes, sir, in the summer term of 1909. I was to have gone up to the University but the war finished all that.'

'Ah, yes, I can understand that. Still, it was a pity in some ways. Your games-master at school was confident that you would have got a Rugger blue. An honour like that is often more useful to a man in business than a classical education. I speak with authority—as one who left school at twelve and so had neither!'

David smiled and shrugged. Where on earth had the

Chairman discovered that he had been considered a good rugger-player? It was so long ago and far away that he himself had almost forgotten the fact.

'And so you volunteered for the Army,' Mr. Sterner continued. 'I imagine you got a commission?'

'Yes, sir. In the summer of 1900. Of course, there was such a flap on they started throwing commissions around just then,' he added.

'Becoming modest,' the Chairman commented with a sly smile. 'Did you stay long with your regiment?'

'No, sir, not very long. We spent most of the time digging anti-aircraft ditches and then filling them in again and that got a bit boring. So I asked for a transfer.'

'Where to?'

'The Commandos, actually. They were the glamour-boys just then and I suppose I was young and impressionable.'

'So you found something more exciting than digging trenches?'

'Well, I suppose it was more exciting. It was hard work, though, and only exciting in spots.'

'Did you take part in many raids?'

'Quite a few.'

'And you were decorated?'

'Well, yes. They gave me an M.C. in the end.' David suddenly appealed to Mr. Sterner. 'All this is a bit embarrassing, sir. Let's say I was lucky and leave it at that.'

'Ah, the English,' said Mr. Sterner. 'Infuriating people. They can't even tell the truth when it's to their own credit. Anyone would think you were ashamed of your war-effort. You won a medal—and deserved it—and yet you behave as though I had accused you of robbing the till. If you were a Frenchman or a German you would tell me the facts without blushing. But you curl up with embarrassment as though you had done something shameful.'



No wonder the English are the envy and the exasperation of the so-called civilized world.'

David shrugged again. He could not see what the events of nearly a decade ago had to do with his present job and prospects.

'Do please have another cigarette,' said Mr. Sterner. 'The inquisition is almost over and I hope the point of it will soon emerge.'

David rose and took another cigarette from the gold box. He busied himself in lighting it with his own matches, in spite of the efficient lighter attached to the box. During these few seconds he searched again frantically in his mind for the reason behind this strange interview but no answer occurred to him. Warily he sank back into the armchair.

Again Mr. Sterner appeared to have read his thoughts. 'You must forgive me,' he said, 'for this seeming impertinence. I have not asked you to call on me, merely to waste your time and my own. But before I get on to the real point of your visit, I have got to get to know you as best I can. You may wonder how anyone can get to know someone else on the strength of a ten minutes' chat. You may be right. But in my career I have often had to rely on even more fleeting impressions—perhaps to invest a very large sum of money on a man's reputation, on what someone else thinks of him. When there are tens of thousands at stake, you learn to sum a man up quickly. In the war, you probably sensed at once whether you would trust a man in action or not. You developed a sort of instinct for that, didn't you?'

David nodded.

'Well, at the stress of war brought out in you, the stress of making in business—and it is a stress at times, between me—has brought out in me. But forgive me, I am apt to digress. That is the penalty of reaching a position where people assume they are paid to listen and

not to argue. He smiled and the long lines that ran from either side of his nose to his chin deepened but his eyes remained alert. He hesitated for a moment and tidied the papers on his desk, edge to edge. Then, looking straight at David, he went on.

'You have probably guessed that your answers to my questions were not new to me? You have? Then, as this next episode is rather a personal one, please let me tell you my version of it and you can correct me, if I get it wrong.

'In 1903 you transferred, at your own request, to the Special Air Service. During the Italian campaign you were in charge of a patrol dropped behind the enemy lines. You were to raid a German headquarters. The report states that it was a highly successful operation. Your patrol caused immense chaos and several casualties in the staff headquarters, although unfortunately the German corps commander was away in Rome—and so he accidentally escaped. You got back safely and were recommended for a bar to your Military Cross. But you never got it. It leaked out through the men of your patrol that several of the junior German staff officers surrendered to you without firing a shot. The story went that one of them was shot. By your orders—in fact, by you.' He looked up inquiringly from the papers he had been reading.

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David went red. The years peeled away and he felt tense, and yet empty inside, like a hard, hollow automaton and not a man; just as he had felt as the earth came swinging up towards him in the half-anth of that Italian day. He remembered with a shuddering he had buried the memory deep, hiding his part in some bracken, grouping his men and the hasty roll-call. Then skirting the valley in which lay the cluster of farmhouse

buildings that was now the enemy headquarters. For the first time, the dots and contour-lines of the large-scale map were disconcertingly translated into reality—but it was all as he had known, it would be. Leaving the fire support group out to a flank, with the whispered reminder of when and if to open fire, and the rendezvous back in the hills when the operation was over. Then taking the rest of his men to join the partisan outpost that had been given orders by wireless to keep watch on the headquarters and report movements. He recalled the faces of the two partisans as though they were in the room beside him now—swarthy young men bulging with weapons, excited and gesturing in a comic opera and yet curiously savage manner. To them it was a personal war; that very farmhouse perhaps had been commandeered from a father or an uncle.

And then the attack. Loping ahead across the wet fields where mist and the grey light of dawn mingled, they had surprised a sleepy sentry, who had died before the shock awoke him. Then the raking burst of fire through the outhouse which, they knew from reports, housed the defence squad. A moment of complete silence followed the bop-bop-bop of the tommy guns—and then confusion sprang to life. There was startled shouting, the clatter of hobnailed boots, one or two isolated shots which were soon silenced by bursts from their own tommy guns. Somewhere on the still dark hillside a dog barked, anxious yelping. And yet further away, a cock crowed, the thin notes piercing the sudden stillness that had descended on the farmhouse. The battle was over.

His men rounded up the German headquarter staff. David scanned their faces. He had memorized the features of the German corps commander from studying countless photographs and he realized with a sudden shock of disappointment that the General was not present.

'Are you sure they're all here?' he asked his sergeant. 'Positive, sir. I've been through all the rooms.'

David turned to a German-speaking N.C.O. 'Ask them where their General is.'

One of them answered with a shrug and a smile that he could not—or did not—try to hide.

The corporal said, 'The General's in Rome, sir. Called away to some urgent conference last night.'

David swore once and then bit his lip. It was damnable luck to get this far with no casualties and then find that the prize bird had flown. Just his bloody luck, he thought, and his anger grew.

'Any of these other birds worth taking?' he thought aloud. He spoke to the partisans who were glaring at the line of German prisoners. 'Do you know any of these officers? Is one of them worth taking with us? *Presto*,' he added, 'we've got to get a move on. This neighbourhood won't be too healthy in five minutes' time.'

The taller of the two partisans pointed to a German officer who wore a greatcoat over his pyjamas. 'That is the one,' he said. 'He comes into the village, line up all the young girls and pick my sister Maria. He take her away, try to—how you say?—rape her. She fights at him and—and so he kill her.' Hate gave dignity to the swarthy, stubbled face of the young partisan.

David thought fast. If he handed the officer over to them, they would kill him slowly, savagely. No more than he deserved, perhaps, the arrogant-looking bastard, yet there was no proof. But there was no time to think it out coolly. Every second they hung round here they were risking a counter-attack. To get away was the first object.

'All right,' he said. 'We'll take him with us. Grab him, two of you, and if he puts a step wrong, let him have it. Sergeant, round up the others and into that shed with

them. Chuck a tear-gas bomb in after them. That'll keep them quiet while we get away. Johnson, you've grabbed all the papers you could find from the offices? Williams, you smashed the telephone switchboard? Good man. Right, let's go.'

They slid away into the half-light. The raid had not lasted more than three or four minutes from the first shot. There were no casualties and, up to a point, it had been successful. But only up to a point, thought David, as they trotted back to the rendezvous. The big prize, capturing the corps commander, had been missed. Apart from putting the fear of God into a soft-living set of staff chaps, pyjamas indeed, and snatching a few secret papers, the trip might just as well not have been made. He stumbled on a stone in the path and then kicked at it in irritation. He could feel a slow, senseless anger mounting inside himself.

They reached the rendezvous, joined up with the support group and then struck off across country. The plan was to make for the coast and lie up until a submarine came close inshore to pick them up. For four nights it would come at the same hour each night. If none of the raiding party had reached the coast by then, they would be written off and the submarine would not return. They were making good progress. At this rate, David calculated as they swung along a mountain track, they might even make the coast by tonight. Sixteen hours to cover forty miles? No, they wouldn't make it, even without incidents. But they'd break the back of the journey today, lie up for the night and have an easy run-in tomorrow. Always barring accidents. Round the next corner they might bump into a German outpost. The party trudged on, zigzagging along the rough track that somehow stuck to the mountainside.

After two hours of the forced march, David raised his

right arm high over his head. The party halted and scattered off the track, forming an irregular diamond pattern with each man facing outward as he lay on the ground. They were well trained; they knew that this was no time to relax, twenty miles behind the enemy lines in strange territory. Even at a ten minutes' rest they were ready to fight if they had to.

The sergeant, who had been bringing up the rear, crawled over to where David lay. Dropping down beside him, he whispered, 'I don't think this Jerry's going to make it, sir. The track's playing hell with his feet, seeing he's only got an old pair of slippers on. Another five miles of this and he's going to have lumps of raw meat for feet.'

'You're sure he's not just playing up?' asked David.

'Not him, sir. He's not complaining. Just looks at us as though we'd crawled out of a bit of mouldy cheese. But his feet are beginning to bleed now.'

'Oh, hell,' David muttered. 'One bloody thing after another. First we miss their damn' General and now it looks as though we've got to carry this bastard the rest of the way. No, to hell with it. He can walk his feet down to the bone.'

The sergeant paused. 'Is he all that valuable to us, sir? These I-ties want to know if they can take him over.'

'You bet they do. And cut little bits off him with their knives once they'd got him clear. Mind you, a bastard like that deserves it.'

'One of them told me that his sister—the one this Jerry tried to screw and then killed—was only fifteen,' the sergeant said.

David said nothing. Toughened as he was to excesses, he was quietly appalled. After a moment's silence, he asked, 'Did you find out how he killed her?'

'Yes, sir. He half-strangled her and then he kicked her head in.'

There was another pause. Then David said, 'Well, let me think about it. For two pins, I'd let him have it myself. He'll probably hang for it anyway, if we get him back with us.'

'But there'd be no evidence, sir,' the sergeant pointed out. 'These I-ties will have to go back to their own chaps once they've seen us over the crest of the ridge. We can't take them off with us and without them there's no evidence against the bastard.'

'You're right,' David said. He looked at his wrist-watch. 'Time's up. Let me think about it on this spell. I'll decide what we'll do at the next halt. Okay, let's go.'

He stood up and stretched himself. He waved his arm, like a bowler delivering the ball, and then began to trudge up the slope. Around him the rest of the party fanned out and moved forward. It was now broad daylight and so they weaved in and out of the shadows, scrambling along dried gullies and clattering across the scree on the mountainside. There were no roads nearby where vehicles could drive and they were reasonably safe until they crossed the ridge of the mountain. Once across, they could rest up until darkness fell and then make their way by easy stages down to the coast. David did not want to reach the coast much before dawn next day. There would then be another twelve hours' wait before the submarine turned up, and he knew from experience the problems of keeping a dozen men under cover all that time, especially when they had an unpleasant prisoner to watch.

That prisoner. As David worked his way towards the crest and breathed in the thin mountain air, he began to think about the prisoner and the more he thought the

more his anger grew. War had become an impersonal thing—kill or be killed—and the enemy had been impersonal. Sometimes they fought well and then you had a curious respect for them, just as you had when in peacetime you knew that you were going to play against a good football team. Sometimes they got rattled and fought badly, as this headquarter staff had done a few hours ago, and then you felt contempt for them. But there was no real feeling of hatred against the men themselves. They were doing what they were told and the better they carried out their orders, the better soldiers you thought them to be. Men were too disillusioned nowadays to feel that they were fighting a crusade against the powers of darkness, or whatever crap old Chamberlain had said at the beginning. Why, if Adolf Hitler himself suddenly dropped out of the clouds into a British camp, the chaps would crowd round in curiosity and half of them would offer him a cigarette and the other half would organize a brew-up of tea.

But this was something new. This was something concrete to hate. His own men were no saints. They flirted with the Italian girls and jollied them along. Any signorina who was ready and willing—and so many were—did not lack for British escorts. Quite a large proportion of the forthcoming population of Italy was going to have a dash of Anglo-Saxon blood mingled with the Latin strain. That was fair enough; it was inevitable. And sometimes a man had a drop too many on board and made a pass at an Italian girl when she wasn't ready to reciprocate. Vino and plump, foreign girls were an explosive mixture. But David had met no Englishman or American who indulged in a cold lust, lining up the women of a village and picking out a kid dispassionately, like a farmer at a fat stock show. And when she wouldn't play, not just giving her a hiding or even killing her

quickly, but kicking her to death, letting the lust of sadism take over from the lust of sex. A man like that wasn't fit to live.

David signalled for the partisan who had picked out the German officer to come forward. The young Italian came scrambling up, springing across the rough ground like a mountain goat. He smiled with a flash of white teeth. David spoke slowly. 'This German officer—you are sure he is the one who killed your sister?'

The partisan nodded. His face went dark. 'He was the one,' he said.

'Will you swear to that?'

The partisan thrust his hand inside his shirt. Resting on the black mat of hair on his chest was a crucifix on a chain. He pulled it out and clenched his right fist over it. With a theatrical gesture, he raised his fist and looked up at the sky. 'I swear it,' he said.

'Okay,' David said. 'That's all I wanted to know.'

The partisan tugged at David's jerkin, a shy and yet somehow peremptory action. 'Let my cousin and me fix him,' he pleaded. 'He is no good to you. He will only get in your way. We can take him off your hands and fix him.' He smiled wolfishly, drawling out the word 'fix' until his mouth hissed.

'Sorry,' said David. 'He's my baby now. I mean, the responsibility for him rests with me. Get back to your place and leave it to me.'

The partisan was about to argue but he saw that David's face was set. He shrugged his shoulders elaborately and dropped back into line.

David waited for a moment or two and then he also let the rear party overtake him until he was level with his sergeant who escorted the German prisoner. The man was plodding along in a pair of felt slippers, as the sergeant had mentioned. David could see that they were

ripped and torn with the sharp stones on the mountain-side and there was a dark patch along one instep that could have been sweat but which was probably blood. The man was limping badly but he held his head high and took no notice of the escorting sergeant and the newly arrived officer. His face was pale and his nose sharp with pain and fatigue but his eyes were unconcerned, aloof.

David began to hate him all the more with a gust of irrational feeling. If the man had cringed or whimpered, made a nuisance of himself and begged to rest his wounded feet, then contempt might have softened the rage. But this specimen of the master-race was so sure of himself, so convinced of his superiority, that neither pity nor contempt could be felt for him.

David moved alongside him. 'Do you speak English?'

The prisoner gazed at him for several seconds and then drawled, 'Yes, a little.'

'Say "sir" when you speak to me,' David snapped. It was a childish gesture and he knew it, as soon as he had uttered the words.

The prisoner looked at him again. 'You are a captain, I see, and I too am a *Hauptmann*—a captain. Officers of equal rank do not say "sir" to each other.'

'In this case *you* do. You're my prisoner and I am your commanding officer. You will call me "sir".'

The prisoner looked at him condescendingly. He shrugged. 'If you demand it, I have no choice in the matter—sir.'

It was a hollow victory and David knew it. Now he had to master this arrogance somehow. 'Did you hear what the partisan accused you of, back at your headquarters?' he asked.

'I heard,' the prisoner replied. 'These people are poor creatures. Once they fought with us, now they fight

with you. Whichever side is advancing, they advance with it. If there is a temporary setback, they look around for a fresh master to serve.'

'This is no temporary setback. This time it's for keeps. But let's stick to the point. He accused you of killing his sister. Is that true?'

The German officer limped on without answering.

'Answer me,' David shouted. 'Did you or did you not kill his sister?'

'In a village where they breed like—rabbits, do you say?—I do not pretend to know the relationship between one and another.'

'Don't beat about the bush. Did you kill a young girl in the village? Yes or no?'

'I was at London University for a year before the war. That is why I speak your language. I studied moral philosophy—Kant, Hegel, the German masters.' He spoke proudly. 'Perhaps you also have studied philosophy?'

'Let's stick to the point,' David said. 'This isn't a philosophical discussion. I just want a straight answer to a straight question. Did you kill that girl?'

'Where there is no straight question, how can there be straight answers? She provoked me, spat at me, tried to scratch out my eyes with her sharp fingernails. I had to defend myself, did I not? These children of a slave race cannot expect to insult a German officer and go unpunished.'

'So you tried to rape her and she wouldn't play—so you killed her. You admit it?'

'“Rape” and “kill” are ugly words.'

'They are meant for ugly things. You're a proper bastard, aren't you?'

'Please do not take advantage of the situation by insulting me—sir. You forget I am a German officer.'

Our orders were that we could pick any Italian village girl we wanted. Why should one make a fuss over a girl who was too ignorant to appreciate the honour of being selected by a German officer?' He limped up the slope, squaring his shoulders as he went.

'I've heard everything now,' David muttered to the sergeant, who had been listening to the conversation. 'I'm going to put the fear of God into this swine before I'm finished.'

'What are you going to do, sir?'

An idea was forming in David's mind. A crazy idea, but the more he thought of it the more it appealed to him. The anti-climax of the raid had left him dissatisfied, eager for some more action. He wanted to make up for the comparative failure and now this arrogant German murderer was becoming a legitimate target for revenge. It was time for the next short halt and, while his feelings were taut, he would carry out his plan.

He spoke to the sergeant. 'We'll halt here. You take the rest of the chaps on a couple of hundred yards and leave the prisoner with me. And leave me your pistol as well, will you?'

The sergeant looked startled. 'What are you going to do, sir?'

'Well, I hope I'm going to shoot this so-and-so. But I want to give him a chance. That's why I need your pistol as well as my own.'

The sergeant looked at him in wonder. 'You must be crazy,' he said. 'He's a prisoner. You just can't shoot him down and get away with it.'

'I'm not just going to shoot him down. He'll have a chance, won't he? He won't be unarmed.'

'But what happens if he gets you instead?'

'Good luck to him. It'll be up to you then to carry on. You know where the rendezvous on the coast is. You

can take the chap there. If you want to take time off to recapture him, do so.'

'But won't the bound of shooting bring the Jerries after us?'

'I doubt it,' said David. 'We must be a good ten miles from the nearest Jerry camp. One or two stray shots round here won't count. Come on—let's have your pistol.'

'Well, begging your pardon, but I think you want your head tested. I never heard of anything like this.'

'No, I don't suppose it's laid down in King's Regs. Come on, Sergeant, don't let's waste time nattering. Give me your pistol—there's a good chap.'

The sergeant shook his head and then fumbled as he unholstered his automatic. He handed it over and David checked the action to make sure it was loaded. The other men were watching this pantomime, except for the German prisoner who sat on the ground gazing at the misty plains below. He seemed to have cut himself off from the mob, aloof and superior. David went over to him.

'On your feet,' he said. 'We've got a date—just the two of us.'

The German looked at him coldly. 'I do not understand,' he said. 'What do you want of me?'

'We're going to settle our little argument—with pistols.'

A shadow flicked across the other man's face and then left it impassive. 'I have no argument with you,' he answered. 'I must remind you of the rules of warfare. I am your prisoner and you are responsible for my safe keeping until you hand me over to your authorities.'

'Don't let's have another philosophical discussion. Either you take a chance with me or, by God, I'll hand you over to the partisans. Take your choice.'

For the first time the prisoner looked startled. He watched David's face but saw that he was in earnest.

‘But this is not correct,’ he said. ‘I have certain rights under the rules of war. You cannot do this.’

‘Can’t I?’ David replied. ‘If the rules of war allowed you to kill a defenceless child, I imagine they’ll stretch far enough to give me the pleasure of putting a bullet in you—or you to put one in me, for that matter. I’m offering something you never gave that poor kid—a sporting chance.’

‘This is monstrous,’ the German officer said. ‘I——’

David interrupted him. ‘We’re wasting time. You have thirty seconds to decide. Either you fight it out with me or I hand you over to the partisans.’ He glanced at his watch.

The German’s face came alive. His mouth twisted and his eyes were eager, supplicating. His voice sounded cracked as the words came through dry lips. ‘This is madness. Why should we fight each other? We have no quarrel, you and I. That girl means nothing to you. I am in your hands. Let us be reasonable. ‘Don’t force me to fight you. I am not fit. It is many months since I handled a pistol. How do I know you won’t trick me?’

‘You’ve just got to take your chance,’ David said grimly. ‘Come on, time’s up. What’s it to be—me or the partisans?’

The prisoner swung his head from side to side, like a cornered animal looking for a way to escape. He moved his mouth to and fro but no words came from the cracked lips.

‘Come on,’ David said softly. ‘Are you a German officer—or a German coward?’

The prisoner’s pale face went red. He rose stiffly. ‘This is not correct—but I have no choice. If I shoot you, there will be a reprisal, yes?’

‘No,’ David answered. ‘If you shoot me and get away

quickly enough, you'll be safe. The others won't waste time hunting for a useless bastard like you.'

By this time the sergeant had shepherded the rest of the party a hundred yards or so up the track to a spot where it jinked away from view. The sergeant stood at the gap, looking back uncertainly, but David waved him on. He waved back, made a vulgar gesture with the first two fingers of his right hand and then disappeared. David grinned. All at once he felt calm and coldly sure of himself.

'Here's the place,' he said, pointing to a flattish rock a little way from the track. 'This is what we do. You stand that side of the rock and I stand here. Both pistols are loaded, see? I put this one down on my side of the stone and the other here, on your side. That's right—you get into position. Now all you've got to do is to grab your gun and fire. Simple enough?'

David stood close to the rock which was roughly three feet across. His hands hung loosely at his sides but his body was balanced and his weight was forward on his toes. The trick was to watch the other man's eyes, he knew, and to let him make the first move. It was a test of will-power as much as deftness of movement. At first his opponent would be tense and unsure, waiting for him to make the first move. But soon the strain would become too great. The pistol lying on its side on the stone would begin to exercise a fatal magnetism and the other man would grab it.

Perhaps ten seconds passed as they stood watching each other. Although the mountain air was cool, David could see a small drop of sweat break out at the prisoner's hairline and gathering momentum, roll down into his right eyebrow. The prisoner's gaze was locked with David's but his eyes were beginning to dilate with nervous excitement, so that the irises seemed about to submerge in the

surrounding 'whites. A muscle twitched suddenly, once, twice, in his right cheek. He swallowed and unconsciously ran the point of his tongue over his dry lips. Veins stood out as his right hand began to stiffen, the thumb and fingers curving for action.

The moment had come. David jerked slightly, feinting to reach for his pistol. The prisoner, stung into reflex action, jack-knifed forward as he grabbed for the pistol on his side of the rock. David lunged down, reaching not for his own gun but for the one that lay opposite. Just as the prisoner's clutching fingers were fastening on the butt, David swept the back of his left hand across the rock. The prisoner's gun clattered away on to the ground. The German checked and swung frantically sideways, groping for it like a blind man. And David, picking up his pistol in a cool, almost leisurely manner, fired twice into his stooping body. The prisoner was slammed against the ground by the impact. He rolled over on his back, his knees drew up convulsively and he gave a sobbing cough. A trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his slack mouth. He was dead.

David stood there, watching him for a moment while he mechanically holstered his own pistol. Serves you right, you bastard, he thought, and then his mind went blank, drained of feelings. He swung on his heel and began to run up the slope, waving to the men who had crowded into the gap at the noise of the shots. It was only when he caught up with them that he realized that he had left the sergeant's pistol behind with the body of the dead German.

(iv)

'The story went that one of them was shot. By your orders—in fact, by you.'

David jerked back from his memories into the present.

It seemed to take him a second or two to adjust himself to Mr. Sterner's warm room from the bare Italian mountainside. He rotated his shoulders, as though he were trying to rid himself of some clinging weight. And then he began to feel angry that this outsider should pry into his private affairs. With the remnants of his military rank in his mind, David said abruptly, 'Look here, sir. I can't see what I did in the war has anything to do with my job here. All right, so I shot a German prisoner. But he had a chance and he died quickly—not like the poor little kid he murdered. And now, if you don't want me any more, perhaps I'd better go.' He half-rose from the armchair.

'Please, Mr. Flint.' The Chairman held up one hand. 'Please do sit down. Have another cigarette. I apologize if I have offended you. I did not mean to, I assure you. I'm not criticizing your war-career. I admire a man of action who can take the law into his own hands on occasions. I only wanted to make absolutely sure that you are the same David Flint as in this confidential report. I wouldn't have induced you to join this company if I hadn't admired a man like you.'

'You induced me to join?'

'Oh, yes. I very much wanted your services. How do you think that advertisement—in a paper you never read in the usual way—came to your notice? Through a man called Summers, wasn't it? Who persuaded you to apply for the vacancy? Summers again, wasn't it? Summers is also in my employ, Mr. Flint.'

'Summers? I don't understand——'

'Let me explain, Mr. Flint. I haven't got on in business without learning that if circumstances aren't just as you want them, they can often be manipulated, a little this way, a little that.' He smiled and arched his fingers, turning them to and fro. Then he added, 'I wanted a man like you. A man who hated Germans—or rather, a certain

kind of German. A man who had distinguished himself fighting against the Germans, who could think coolly and act fast. And above all, a man with no close family ties. I made very thorough investigations, I can tell you, and studied the careers of several young men like yourself but none of them quite suited my requirements. And so I had to arrange that you would join my business.'

'But you don't need to have been in action to check invoices. A conscientious objector could do my job—probably better than me.'

'I'm glad you mentioned invoices,' said Mr. Sterner. 'That was the final test. I wanted a man who had all those other qualifications but who could also stick to a dull job. If you had been the jumpy, undisciplined sort you would have resigned by now, or insulted someone senior and been sacked. You don't know it but I have had you closely watched both before and since you joined us. I've now decided that you are right for a rather special task I have in mind. But talking is thirsty work—would you care for a drink?'

David said, 'Thank you, sir.'

The Chairman rose and went over to a mahogany side-board. 'Sherry?' he asked, 'or gin? Or whisky perhaps? Or something more exotic?'

'Whisky, please, sir.' It was a long time since David had drunk a good Scotch whisky and he suspected that, like the Chairman's other possessions, it would be good.

'That's the spirit—if you will excuse the unintentional pun,' Mr. Sterner smiled. 'Whisky always seems a man's drink to me, although I only drink it rarely. Doctor's orders, I'm afraid. Water or soda?'

'Water, please.'

The Chairman walked over and handed David a cut-glass tumbler which was more than half-full of neat whisky. He added a few drops of water from a matching

cut-glass jug. 'Don't want to dilute it too much and ruin it,' he said. He walked back to the other side of his big desk and raised his own glass. 'Here's good luck,' he said.

'Cheers,' replied David automatically and took a drink. The whisky was smooth and strong. It gave him a warm, comfortable feeling as he relaxed in his armchair. He noticed that Mr. Sterner had taken a very small measure for himself and, in spite of his remarks, had diluted it to the palest straw colour. But David was beyond caution. There was no doubt that the Chairman had an almost hypnotic charm when he cared to exert it. Sipping the excellent whisky as he lolled back in the soft armchair, David felt that the situation was quite unreal; it was as though his appointment at the cinema had flashed forward several hours. He still could not fathom the purpose of this meeting but he was in a genial mood where he would rather listen to almost anything than go back to checking invoices from a hard wooden seat. He inhaled the expensive, hand-cut cigarette he had taken from the gold box and waited for the Chairman to go on.

As if following his cue, Mr. Sterner said, 'Excuse me for a moment.' He flicked the switch of his intercommunication transmitter and said, 'Miss Gathers? I don't want to be disturbed for the next half-hour. Please deal with all incoming phone calls, however urgent. And by the way, if I am not through before quarter past five, you needn't wait any longer. You understand?' There was a crackle of assent from the box and he switched off. Turning to David, he said, 'Please forgive me, I am being thoughtless. I should have asked you if you had any urgent appointments after office hours. Our talk may take us a little over normal hours. Do tell me if you have other plans and we can cut our meeting short.'

'That's quite all right, sir,' David said. This was better,

he felt, that rushing off to a hasty cold supper and then queuing for the pictures. This was better than any film.

'You're quite sure?' Mr. Sterner asked. 'Right. Now we fully understand each other, I can begin on the story proper. It's rather a long and involved story, so please bear with me. Would you look at this photograph, Mr. Flint?' He indicated a studio portrait in a silver frame that stood on his desk. David picked it up and stared at it. The photograph showed the head and shoulders of a young man in R.A.F. uniform. He was dark-haired and eager-looking, staring out of the glossy print as though defying the camera to catch and freeze his vitality. There was something, just a trace of the questing look, that made the young man resemble Mr. Sterner.

'A fine-looking chap,' David commented diplomatically as he replaced the photograph on the desk.

The Chairman glanced at it for a moment before replying. 'Thank you,' he said. 'My only son. He had the same name as you—David. He was a fine boy.'

David noted the past tense and grunted sympathetically.

'Yes, he was a fine boy,' Sterner went on, speaking almost to himself, 'although he was my son. He was still at Oxford when the war broke out. He could have had a soft job—I could have fixed it—but he was determined to get into the R.A.F. I was proud of him for that. They put him on bombers, he did nearly thirty raids over enemy territory. We Jews have a savage code and I was glad, glad, when I knew he was dropping bombs on our enemies. He never talked much about what he was doing but I knew he loved flying. He was promoted to flight-lieutenant—just before that picture was taken—and his C.O. recommended him for the D.F.C. And then, when he had only three more trips to make before his tour of duty finished, he was shot down.'

'What hellish luck,' David said to fill the silence. 'But

it was probably all over in a second or two. He wouldn't have known a thing about it.'

'No, Mr. Flint, you do not understand. He was not shot down and killed. Better for him if he had been. No, he made a crash-landing and was taken prisoner. His leg was broken in the crash but otherwise he was all right.'

David looked questioningly at him.

'Let me explain further Mr. Flint. My son was put in a military hospital in Germany where he was treated correctly. But some complications developed and he was moved for special attention to a private hospital, which was also an important research station. It happened to be near Auschwitz, the concentration-camp. The surgeon in charge was a certain Doctor Knelle, a fanatical Nazi. A brilliant doctor, I believe, but emotionally warped, a sadist. He spotted at once that this R.A.F. flyer, one of the hated men who disproved Gocring's boast that no enemy bomb would ever fall on German territory, was a Jew. A British pilot and a Jew. That was enough for him. He took my son and used him for experiments.'

'My God, no,' said David.

'Ah, you realize what that means. You know what they did to gipsies and Polish Jews. Well, he did those terrible things to my son. Those tests to find out the amount of heat and cold the human body can endure. Hours lying naked in a bath with the temperature down so low that the water gradually turned to ice. And then being plunged into almost boiling water. Days and nights of torment to prove or disprove a theory. But that was not all. This surgeon had to use the knife as well. Among other devilish work, he—he castrated my son.'

'God,' David muttered.

'In the end—mercifully—my son died. If he had come through the war, all this'—and he waved his arm—'would have been his one day. He was a clever boy and

good too. Better educated than I am, more ready to take money in his stride and know what I have never been able to learn, that you should make money work for you and not the other way round. Today he would be gradually taking over the business, married perhaps, with a son of his own to carry on one day. Now, there is just myself and no one else. I only had one child and my wife died years ago.'

He stopped and looked once more at the photograph. Then he went on briskly, 'But you are wondering how I know all this. I will tell you. As soon as the war ended, I began my inquiries. My agents are in many places and I have some influence. I traced my son's movements from the crash to the prison-camp hospital and from there to the private research station. I have interviewed the survivors of his aircrew and even the poor inmates of Auschwitz. Here'—and he tapped a sheaf of what seemed to be photographs—'are photostat copies of evidence given under oath by men who were in the same hospital ward, who saw what my son suffered, who even suffered the same things but were lucky enough—or unlucky—to survive. Read these statements, if you doubt me.' He tossed the heap of photostats across the desk.

He went on speaking while David glanced at the photostats. 'Every word there has been checked and double-checked. Do you think that I have not wished a thousand times that a mistake had been made? But the evidence is overwhelming.'

'Have you reported it to the R.A.F. authorities?' asked David. 'Surely the War Crimes people would follow it up and have this doctor, Herr what's-his-name, put on trial?'

'Of course I had the matter reported. In fact the R.A.F. Special Branch conducted their own independent inquiries and reached the same conclusion.'

'Have they tried the doctor then?'

'No. In the confusion and chaos immediately after the war ended he disappeared. Vanished without a trace.'

'But if he's still alive, they'll catch up with him one day and deal with him.'

'He is still alive. I have proof of it.'

'Well, then what are they waiting for?'

Sterner smiled, a smile that merely deepened the lines on his face but which held no humour. 'You have the average decent Englishman's faith in justice being done and right triumphing in the end, I see,' he said. 'Often it works that way—but in this case it won't. Shall I tell you why? There are two reasons and the greatest one is expediency. It is very hard for the English to keep up an impersonal hatred. Did you—personally—hate Hitler and his gang? I don't think so. They were symbols of evil, true, and they caused you a lot of trouble and grief. But you didn't hate them with an enduring hate. They were too vague and far away, too well known in outline and too little known as individuals for you to feel a personal hate. And that was while the war was going on. We have had three years of so-called peace—memories grow faint. Oh, the R.A.F. will keep the file open but as the months go by and Knelle remains in hiding, it will gather dust in some filing cabinet. And one day a clerk will take it out, dust it off, initial it and then bury it for ever. To him the case of Flight-Lieutenant David Sterner will be just another unsolved crime, to be written off along with thousands of others.'

'But you're presupposing, aren't you, sir, that this Knelle man will keep under cover for a long time. Can't he be forced out of hiding, wherever he is?' David asked.

'I think he is safe now, even if he walked out of hiding tomorrow. That is what I mean by expediency. Our ex-allies, the Russians, have shown their hand. The

Western statesmen are more scared of the Russians than they are of defeated Germany. And so they will build up Germany as a buffer against the Russians. Already the Americans are beginning to reduce the sentences of war-criminals held in their zone. The War Crimes Tribunals are ending. In the next few months it will be considered bad taste to drag up a past that is daily growing more remote. I do not say that if Knelle re-emerges he will be greeted with shouts of joy—although if he offered his services to the East Zone and hinted on his war career, the Russians would welcome him. As a brilliant surgeon, he will be a useful man in the new Germany. Only a very few Germans will know his true story and they will keep quiet through fear of implicating themselves. So, in a year or two, he will quietly re-emerge and within five years he will be Professor of Surgery at some German university—or have a large private practice.'

'But surely then the R.A.F. authorities will come forward with their proof?'

'Do you really think so? Some conscientious officer, who may have bothered to keep the file open and watch out for the name Knelle, might conceivably start inquiries. But I doubt it. Most of the wartime R.A.F. men will have been demobilized or have been posted abroad. There must be thousands of files in the Air Ministry and no one is likely to memorize the facts of all of them. And even if a man had the knowledge and the public conscience to start the ball rolling, do you think it would roll far? The Foreign Office would soon step in and suggest that the tactful—the expedient—thing to do would be to forget about it all. When the diplomats are busy rearming the Germans so that our own troops, each of them with a useful vote to cast, can be brought back home, they will not want such a gaffe to upset our new friends and allies, the German people. I hate to shatter your faith—which

does you credit—in the workings of democracy but I have lived through an earlier war. I have seen and this happen once before and it is happening again now. History can and does repeat itself, you know.'

David could see the sense in what Mr. Sterner was saying. But if there was nothing to be done about this swine Knelle, he could not understand why the Chairman should tell him the whole painful story. He said so, in more gentle terms.

'Why should I tell you all this?' Sterner echoed. 'Well, now we have reached the whole point of our discussion. I will tell you why I have placed all these facts before you.' He looked straight at David. 'I want you to kill Knelle for me.'

'You—what?' said David.

'I want you to kill Knelle. Oh, I have not gone mad suddenly, believe me,' he hurried on. 'I have spent days and nights thinking about this, turning it over and over. If I were twenty years younger, I would kill him myself, slowly, painfully—as he killed my son. But I am too old now, too little the man of action, I fear.' He smiled gently. 'But you are young, a man who has proved himself in battle, who has already killed Germans. I would make it worth your while, of course. I have worked out the details. You will buy a block of shares in my company for a nominal sum—which I would privately advance to you, of course—and when you had done the job, I would buy them back from you for, shall we say?—ten thousand pounds. In that way, you would escape income-tax. Ten thousand pounds for a young man still on the right side of thirty. There are many things to do and many places to visit on ten thousand pounds.'

'You're asking me to murder a man, a complete stranger, for ten thousand pounds? I must be dreaming,' David muttered.

'Not murder,' Sterner retorted, 'execution, rather. Look at that evidence in front of you. Is a man like that fit to live?'

'Fit or not, you can hardly expect me to go up to him and say, "Is your name Knelle?" And if he says, "Yes," take out a gun and shoot him. I don't know much about these things but aren't there men you can hire for this kind of job?'

'There are. I have been carefully into all that. But I don't want some pathological case, some hired assassin, to be responsible for executing the murderer of my son. The man who does it must be a decent man, someone like my son himself. Besides,' he added practically, 'I cannot afford to put myself afterwards at the mercy of a professional killer. Blackmail is an ugly thing.'

'Talking of blackmail, aren't you taking a risk by telling me all this?'

'I don't think so. You are not the blackmailing kind. And besides, you have no proof. It is only your word against mine. Who would believe a junior employee who told such a cock-and-bull story against his own chief?' He grinned at David and appeared more bird-like than ever. But now, thought David swiftly, the bird in question could be a vulture.

He pondered for several moments and then spoke slowly, framing his meaning with difficulty. 'Will you let me tell you my first reactions, sir?' Sterner nodded. 'It is a shocking story and I believe it. Unless you had gone completely mad, you would not tell me all this unless you thought it was true. And I can see from looking at the evidence that it must be true. I am entirely in sympathy with you. If I were in your shoes, I should want to kill this bastard, if you'll excuse the expression. But—how can I put it?—although I feel strongly about it, I'm an outsider in the matter. It's not my personal problem. I don't

go around killing strangers because they've done foul things.'

'But what about that German officer who murdered the little Italian girl? Was that your personal problem?' came the sly question.

'That was a bit different. It's hard to explain but in war-time you get keyed up, able to do things you wouldn't normally dream of doing. You're tuned up for doing things quickly without working them out first. I'm not tuned up now. I had enough way to last me the rest of my life and all I want to do now is relax and forget it.'

'Let me put the proposition rather differently. I have local offices in many parts of the Continent and through the Middle East. As soon as the war was ended, I began to re-establish them as fast as it could be done. And, apart from their normal business, each of my office managers had one special job, although they didn't and still don't know the reason. It was to locate Knelle. I knew that he could disappear for several months, perhaps for several years, if he had managed to store away sufficient money. But sooner or later he would have to re-emerge. You see, the one thing about a doctor, particularly a surgeon, is that he can do—and wants to do—no other job. He is bound to give himself away in the end. My managers in Germany and everywhere else have their own means of finding out whether a strange doctor has suddenly arrived in the locality. So I was content to sit back and wait. I am used in business deals to try and place myself into the other man's head. To see the problem as he sees it and decide what steps he will take. What would I do if I were Knelle, which God forbid? Would I sit tight in Germany or would I try to put as big a distance as I could between myself and the scene of my crimes? I gradually came to the point of deciding that Knelle would make for the Middle East before long and I warned my branch managers there

to keep a special watch for him. I was right, it turned out. After disappearing completely for the best part of three years, Knelle was reported last week in Cairo.'

'Cairo is a big place,' David remarked.

'Yes—but not so big as Western Europe. Now that he has emerged from hiding, he can't disappear again quite so quickly. This is my proposal. You needn't decide here and now whether you will undertake the task I offer. But will you go on a roving assignment for me? I could appoint you—shall we say?—an inspector of Middle East branches of the business. At the company's expense you can travel to Egypt, Israel, the Lebanon—all interesting places and far pleasanter than England at this time of the year. You will have a liberal expense account and in any case you will learn something of how a widespread organization like this functions overseas. You could spend six months, a year perhaps, travelling in this way. And if you decide during that time that you would like to help me avenge my son, then you will be on the spot for the job.'

'And if I decided that I didn't want to help you in that way?'

'That would be a risk I accept. I can afford to give one young man, even if he has expensive tastes,' Sterner smiled, 'a holiday with pay.'

David thought for a moment. 'It is extraordinarily generous of you, sir—but I can't really accept. I do sympathize with you, please believe me. But I just can't see myself in the role of a paid killer. And it would be taking your money under false pretences to spend months swanning around the Middle East—much as I'd like to—without the slightest intention of doing anything about it if I did happen to run across this Knelle man.'

'I appreciate your frankness. You are an honest young man and I like you all the more for that. But think of it

from your own point of view. If I may say so without offence, you are a man without many prospects in this post-war world. The years when you should have been learning a profession you gave up to the war. Now you are nearly thirty with no capital and no special aptitude for business. Can you see yourself drudging for another thirty years in an office like this? Creeping up by instalments of twenty or thirty pounds a year to the post of senior clerk. A young man with enterprise and some capital behind him has the world at his feet. Without capital he will get nowhere in these days of heavy taxation. Ten thousand pounds—twenty thousand, if you like—I won't haggle over it—is not to be sneezed at. With that amount you could buy yourself into any kind of business you choose. Or buy a farm in the Dominions or Southern Rhodesia, if you're the outdoor type. Or merely lead a pleasant life here in England. Don't you like fast cars, good clothes, an occasional meal at an expensive restaurant? You could have them all with twenty thousand pounds.'

'It's a tempting prospect, sir. Very tempting. But haven't you forgotten one point? We are discussing airily doing away with a German criminal. That might be justifiable to you and me but in the eyes of the law it's murder. Ten or twenty thousand pounds wouldn't be much use to me in the condemned cell.'

'I have thought of that. The police force here is very efficient but do you think they catch every man who kills? Or even one in every four? And murders here are usually done by people in the heat of the moment, people whose motives cry out for investigation. With you it would be different. You have no apparent motive for killing a complete stranger. No motive, no suspicion. Besides, you would have my organization to help you. Police forces in the Middle East have more to worry about than the disappearance of some mysterious foreigner. No, I don't

think there would be much risk in it for you—otherwise I would not suggest it. No more risk than you took successfully a hundred times in the war and got away with.’ His voice trailed away and he looked keenly at David who was slumped in his chair in thought.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘we have spoken enough for this first time. I don’t want you to decide in a hurry. Think it over. Look at it from all angles. There is a sadist who deserves to die but who may well get away with his crimes. Here am I, a father who lost his only son in the most bestial way. And there are you, who could earn yourself comfort for life by being the instrument of just vengeance. The proposition is simple enough. Here,’ he added, as David rose to go, ‘take these photostats with you, please. I have other copies. I suggest that you do not show them to your friends. Where the original evidence was in German, you will find certified true translations alongside. I think you will find them—shall I say?—interesting, if nothing more.’

David said, ‘I will certainly read them. And please don’t think that I can’t understand how you feel. I would feel the same if I were in your shoes. But I ought to be honest and warn you that I can’t somehow see myself taking on the job.’

The Chairman rose and extended his hand to David. ‘Thank you, anyway,’ he said, ‘for the patience you have shown in listening to my story. And do not think that I shall feel any the worse about you or that you will lose your job here if you do decide against it. And now please accept my apologies for keeping you so long. Take your time and let me know when you have made up your mind.’

(v)

David went back to his Bayswater lodgings in a daze. After a cold supper he decided not to go to the cinema

after all. His experiences of the last few hours had given him more than enough excitement and confusion. He went up to his poky little bed-sitting room, lit the gas fire that burbled away with a continual grumbling noise because the pipe needed cleaning out and dropped into the so-called armchair that his landlady provided, a chair whose springs creaked under him and which gradually pressed up through the shoddy covering to work their way into the softer parts of his anatomy. Looking at the threadbare carpet, the dingy wallpaper with its effusions of roses and improbable birds trilling away from the foliage, and the framed print of 'The Stag at Bay' that gazed at him mournfully but defiantly, he thought of the contrast between his present room and Mr. Sterner's luxurious office. The Chairman had touched a raw spot when he had spoken of the comfort that money in the bank could bring. David had been used in the war to two extremes: living rough, sleeping under canvas or under the stars, eating bully and biscuits were things he could stand when the business in hand warranted it. But when he was away from operations he had enjoyed all the luxury his Army pay would afford. There was satisfaction in the sharp contrast between the two modes of living. When cold and wet on some raw Italian hillside, he could think back with pleasure on the flesh-pots of Naples or Algiers and look forward keenly to the next bout of comfort.

But this present existence—he could not call it 'living'—held out no promises and contained no remembered pleasures. It was a constant struggle with genteel poverty. An evening out had to be weighed against the pair of shoes that required soling and heeling, a packet of cigarettes against a new pair of socks. Each week it was a matter of taking the few shillings and pence that were surplus when all necessities had been catered for and deciding how they could be spread over the days ahead. It was a minor

tragedy if he happened to be having a solitary half-pint of beer in a pub and some acquaintance dropped in. David, normally hospitable and open-handed, would have to do a hasty calculation and decide whether he should stand the man a drink and go without lunch next day, or turn his back and pretend he had not seen him. He had never been brought up to this penny-weighting kind of life and the futile ignominy of it rubbed him raw.

And here was the prospect of six months in the Middle East with a fat expenses account. Sunshine instead of this perpetual drizzle, gay sights and colours instead of the drab monotone of London, the ease and leisure of late nights and siestas instead of the scurrying to and fro, the scrummaging into and out of Tube trains. The odds, he thought, were against knocking into Knelle. For all the Chairman had said, Cairo, Haifa, Beirut, were like rabbit-warrens. A man could hide away for life in one of them and never be spotted. Knelle was no fool. He would not have kept out of view for nearly three years already if he had not been smart. Even at this stage he was not going to walk about in the open, waiting to be recognized. And if—it was a big ‘if’—Stern’s organization happened to track him down when he, David, was on the spot, he didn’t have to do anything about it. The Chairman had said so.

It was a tempting prospect but David realized that it would be taking Stern’s money under false pretences. Although the actual money would mean nothing to the wealthy Chairman, it would be letting him down to take a penny without meaning to go through with the job. Could he bring himself to kill Knelle, if the man was located? He read through the photostatic evidence, trying to visualize the kind of man—or monster—who could cold-bloodedly experiment on a human being. When he came to the documents which testified how Knelle had

castrated young Sterner and which described artlessly the look of unbelief and then horror on the young man's face when Knelle, who apparently spoke good English, had gloatingly told him what he had done while he was under the anæsthetic, had sneered that here at least was one Jew who would not be spawning his race over the Aryan world, David felt physically sick. Torture and murder he could envisage. But this wanton mutilation of a young man by a skilful doctor who was supposedly civilized was another matter. He knew that savage peoples, the Abyssinians against the Italians, the Arabs against the British, had flung prisoners to their womenfolk who delighted in mutilating them, but this was part of a barbarous code which stemmed from the practical thought that a prisoner so treated would not rear sons to continue the inherited enmity. David could not penetrate the mind or the background of an educated man who could do such things and then delight in them. Doctors, he knew, were often cold-blooded fish who saw human beings as physical mechanisms, test-beds of cause and effect but nothing more. Yet none of the doctors he knew could have brought themselves to this fiendish level.

As he read through the damning indictments, he felt a wave of sympathy for Mr. Sterner. Losing his only son, to whom he could have given so much, in this way—no wonder he wanted revenge. Knelle deserved to die, preferably a slow and agonizing death.

But still David could not see himself as the instrument of justice. As he had tried to tell Mr. Sterner, he was no longer tuned up for violent action. To some men the war had been a drug which they could not get out of their systems when peace arrived. One of the men who had served in his own unit had recently been sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for robbery with violence. David had read about it in the papers, how his defending

counsel had blamed his actions on to the war when life was cheap and violent actions were commendable. The judge had demolished the argument quietly but completely in his summing up. It was one thing, he had pointed out to the jury, to fight hard for your country in war and a totally different thing to use a cosh on a defenceless tobacconist in peacetime. A man was expected to adjust himself from the processes of war to the processes of peace and only the weak or the criminally minded failed to do so. I've finished with fighting, David told himself, as he undressed before climbing into the narrow, lumpy bed. Sterner will have to find someone else to do the job for him.

For the next few days he clung to his resolve. From time to time, as he was checking the interminable invoices or dodging like a wing-forward at the base of the scrum while trying to barge his way into an already overloaded Tube train or eating the skimpy, tasteless meals provided by his landlady, temptation crept up on him, urging him to throw up this dreary routine and take a chance. But he pushed aside the entrancing visions of long, cool drinks under the awnings of Shepherds or the strange green-blue of the sea as it lapped gently around the base of the St. George's Hotel at Beirut with the backcloth of jagged mountains behind.

All that week it seemed to rain unceasingly: a steady, hopeless drizzle that mocked David for a fool who could prefer this work and this climate to the prospect of sunshine and excitement. Head down and stepping delicately to avoid the puddles (the sole of one of his shoes was worn through almost to the uppers), David hurried past the gay windows of travel-agencies on his way to work. He had made up his mind; there was no going back.

Then one evening, the night before his weekly pay-day, he sat alone in his dreary lodgings. He emptied out his

pockets on to the rickety table; a crumpled cigarette-packet with three limp cigarettes inside, a box of matches, a cheap fountain-pen, a grubby handkerchief and one-and-ninepence in cash. Idly he picked up and turned over the shilling, the sixpence and the three pennies. They had to last him until noon the following day when the next pay-packet would arrive. He quickly worked out that he would have to make do with the three cigarettes until then. After allowing sixpence for his fare to the office and a penny-ha'penny for a morning paper, he could not afford to buy even a packet of ten cigarettes. Defiantly, he took one of the cigarettes and lit it. It tasted hot and peppery on the tongue, unlike those smooth, fat cigarettes Sterner had offered him. Oh, blast Sterner, he thought. Why keep on reminding himself of the luxury that could be his, if he just said the word?

David glanced at his watch. Quarter past eight—too early to go to bed and yet he could not even afford the cheapest seat at the cinema. A shilling and a ha'penny to spare meant one half-pint of watery beer at the local pub and a few coppers in change. Flint, you reckless devil, he thought, you're tempted to blow your wealth in one mad drinking-bout—all of half a pint.

He grinned sourly to himself and then stood up and began to pace the room until he stumbled on the threadbare strip of carpet. He sat down again and picked up the evening paper. He had looked at it once but he might as well kill time and go through it again. He turned to one of the middle pages and started to read the latest divorce-case. 'My husband was never the same when he came back from the war,' complained the aggrieved wife. Can you blame the poor devil? David thought. Then two small items of news at the bottom of the column caught his eye. 'Pool Winner Celebrates in Town' was one heading. There was a blurred picture of a laughing young man

sitting next to a pretty girl at some smart restaurant, with a waiter smiling obsequiously and offering them the menu. The caption explained that Stanley Houghton of Melstone, Middleshire, had won twenty thousand pounds in a football pool and was celebrating the occasion with his fiancée 'in London's smart West End'.

Wincing, David read the next-door item. 'War Criminal Released,' it said. 'Former S.S. colonel, Karl Helberg, 42, sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for complicity in the shooting of American prisoners-of-war, was released today by the American authorities. He was met by a rally of former S.S. comrades, some of whom greeted him with Nazi salutes. When asked what he intended to do on release, Helberg smiled but said nothing.' Alongside the text was a picture of the gallant colonel in the days of his glory, the straight-peaked cap shading his eyes but with chin thrust out and right hand flung up in the Nazi salute.

David crumpled up the newspaper and tossed it into a corner. That decided it. Some unknown sub-editor in Fleet Street, assembling the bits and pieces of news to make up a full page, had taken a decision for him.

PART III
INVESTIGATION

(i)

So THIS was Cyprus. David stood near the bows of the ship and watched the low curving bay of Famagusta. It seemed to be sweeping towards him like a scimitar blade while the ship hung motionless upon the pale water. Shafts of sunlight riddled the clear sea near the bows of the ship and David, gazing down two or three fathoms, could see a shoal of minnows flicking golden for a moment as their twisting bodies caught the sun. The sea was a limpid, greeny-grey thing in the early morning sunlight, shifting and pulsing a little like an animal slowly uncoiling itself after sleep.

Looking straight ahead, he could just pick out a copse of masts pricking the whitish sky in the harbour. They must be fishing boats, he thought, caiques on the Greek pattern. Behind them he could discern a high wall with a turret at its right end, as he looked at it. And, caught by the sun, some distance behind the wall, the spires of what seemed to be a Gothic cathedral gleamed grey. There was no one else about on deck, except a dark-skinned sailor who looked vacantly into space and occasionally spat over the side. David was glad that there were no other chattering passengers to break his reverie. The only sounds were the thudding and the throbbing of the engines as the ship slid through the quiet sea towards harbour. This, he felt, was a journey's end—and perhaps an enemies' meeting.

Three weeks had gone by since his dinner with Sterner.

Three hectic weeks which had left him dazed. There had been a passport and visas to obtain, inoculations and injections, tropical kit, arrangements for his reception and drawing accounts to be fixed up, the memorizing of a code for private communication with Sterner and repeated briefing on the characteristics of the quarry, Knelle. This last item had been easy enough. The evidence was detailed enough on the guilt of Knelle but it was woefully scanty where a description of the man himself was concerned. The various witnesses had only seen him in a surgeon's gown and cap, so that they could not describe his figure or the colour of his hair. Even in the hospital wards he had, it appeared, usually worn a medical mask as well and the descriptions of his face were correspondingly vague and conflicting. The evidence boiled down to the facts that Knelle was on the tall side, walked with a slight stoop, had pale-coloured eyes—though here one witness said they were blue, another grey and yet a third green—and spoke fluent English. Though here again, the fluency of his English could not be relied on, as most of the witnesses who had heard him speak it were themselves foreigners with, it seemed, an incomplete grasp of the language. Reading through the notes again and again, David was reminded of Poc's story, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. One would expect men lying in constant fear of death or torture to retain vivid memories of their surroundings and the man responsible. Vivid memories they certainly had but David wondered how much they could be relied on. Fear and hate had coloured them subjectively.

Nor had Sterner been able to find out, with all his resources, anything of Knelle's pre-war career. Estimates of his age varied from one witness to another so that he might have been anything from thirty to sixty. The majority opinion put him in his late thirties so that now, in April 1908, he would be forty or a little more. That

meant, if it were true, that he must have qualified as a doctor about the time that Hitler came to power. Knowing the German's national pastime, form-filling, Sterner was sure that somewhere, in one of the German universities or among the Nazi records, there must be a file with all his particulars and history. Many German war-criminals had helped to convict themselves by the meticulous care with which they recorded the ghastly details of their work. There had been one man who had scrupulously noted all the gold fillings knocked out of the teeth of gas-chamber victims. If Knelle were typical, he would have kept case-papers of the experiments he conducted, the castrations and the amputations. But much of Germany was in Russian hands now, Allied bombing had destroyed offices and records, the Germans themselves, when they knew the end was near, had burnt many incriminating documents. It was like searching for a needle in a scattered haystack. Some time, somewhere, more facts about Knelle might come to light but, meanwhile, David had to go on a vague description that could have fitted any one of five million Germans. Except that he was a doctor, a surgeon, who, sooner or later as Sterner thought, would be driven to taking up his career again. This would narrow the field down, when it happened—if it happened.

If the description of Knelle was so vague, how was it known that he had left Germany for Egypt? David had asked Sterner. The answer was inconclusive. An informer in Madrid had overheard two German ex-Nazis talking late one night in a hotel. They had drunk freely and were becoming indiscreet. The conversation had turned to the fate of their friends and acquaintances and the name Knelle cropped up. The man had edged nearer and heard one of them say that Knelle had passed through Madrid on his way to Egypt only a few days ago. Just that. The informer had given the scrap of information to the Madrid manager

of Eximport, who had asked him to locate the two men again, if he could, scrape up an acquaintance and try to find out more. But, before he could do so, the informer was killed in an accident, knocked down and fatally injured by a taxicab.

'An accident?' David had asked. 'A pretty convenient accident.'

Sterner had shrugged his shoulders. 'Who can say? On the face of things, it would be unlikely that the two Nazis would risk an inquiry, perhaps making them unwelcome guests in Spain, for the sake of their absent friend, Knelle. But strange things happen in peace, as well as war.'

And so, with that frail clue as his only guide, David had boarded a BOAC plane early one morning, bound for Cairo.

Cairo in the spring was the same noisy Cairo of contradictions that he remembered from his occasional wartime visits. In the streets the drivers of bulbous, shiny Cadillacs blared away on their horns while they tried to nudge a donkey or a camel out of their paths; there were women mincing along in high heels and gay frocks and other women who were hidden by rusty black cotton robes that covered them from head to foot so that even their faces were invisible; from the verandas of hotels came the tinkle of cocktail glasses and high-pitched laughter but on the hot pavement outside the shrill piping of beggars; 'Ana meskeen' was the phonetic sound of their cries, as out of a huddle of rags they furtively thrust the raw stump of a limb, crawling with flies, at the unsuspecting passer-by; around the squares there were imposing houses and blocks of flats but some of them were unfinished, exposing a raw edge of brickwork as though the builder had suddenly got tired of his job; and in a vacant patch nearby kite-hawks might be circling over a dead donkey or a heap of unspeakable refuse.

Cairo might be the same old higgledy-piggledy conflict of old and new, of wealth and poverty, on the surface, but it was a Cairo with a new and bitter difference, David realized. There were scowls at a white face or an English accent. Occasionally, on the streets, men in fezes and flowing galabiyehs would deliberately bump into him, trying to shoulder him off the pavement. A few years before they would have slunk into the gutter obsequiously to get out of the path of a British soldier. Servants in hotels were becoming insolent where previously they had bowed and scraped with Oriental self-abasement. It reminded him of the atmosphere in the summer of 1902, when Rommel stood within fifty miles of Alexandria and nothing seemed likely to stop his conquering advance. Then flags with swastikas had appeared overnight and fluttered from upper windows in Alexandria. Nazi salutes could be seen on the streets and British troops were hissed and shouted at. Egypt, the cesspit of the Middle East, was getting ready to fawn on the Germans when they arrived. Later that same year, when Rommel had turned tail and fled westwards and Eighth Army men began to return to Alex. on leave, there was much waving of Union Jacks and cheering for the conquerors. The swastikas had vanished, put away in mothballs, no doubt, in case Rommel ever turned the tables. Opportunist Egypt, thought David, ready to accept the cards only if you dealt from strength.

He spent a few days in Cairo, lounging about in the daytime and in the evenings reluctantly joining in the drinking-bouts that Sanders, the terse Aberdonian manager of Eximport, considered were the only means of passing leisure-time among what he called 'the bluidy Gyppos'. The cable arrived one morning when David was holding his aching head and thinking of joining Alcoholics Anonymous. It said: 'PERSONAL FOR FLINT STOP SPECIAL

ASSIGNMENT REQUIRING ATTENTION ARRIVED CYPRUS STOP
REPORT HASSAN NICOSIA SOONEST.'

David found out from Sanders that Hassan was a Turk and the local Eximport manager in Nicosia, capital of Cyprus. In case Knelle suspected that he was being followed and would check the announcements of passengers arriving direct by air, David decided to fly to Beirut and then take the small passenger steamer that sailed to Cyprus twice a week. Running his furred tongue around his mouth and feeling rather fragile, he was not sorry to leave behind the heat and smells of Cairo and Sanders's unlimited Scotch.

(ii)

And so here he was, approaching Famagusta on what might be the last leg of his quest. As the ship nosed through the quiet waters, setting course in a shallow curve that would bring it alongside the quay, David could pick out a few white houses near the tip of the southern headland. Treating his visit like a military operation, he had studied an ordnance map of Cyprus on his plane-journey to Beirut. The east coast of Cyprus, which the ship was nearing, was shaped like a scythe. The handle was a long narrow peninsula to the north that pointed towards the Sanjak. He had learned that it was sometimes called the Panhandle, as the rest of the island was roughly quadrilateral, about a hundred miles long by about fifty miles wide. A strip of mountains formed a rim along the northern coast; on the west side there was another clump of mountains, rising to about six thousand feet. The central and eastern parts of the island made up one big plain. So much he had learned from the map; as he quartered it methodically, trying to memorize the main roads and the names of the bigger towns, he wondered where Knelle fitted into this picture of browns and greens. Staring at

the map, he had recalled that childhood game where you had to pick out hidden faces in a picture. If you turned the picture slightly sideways and looked at the more obvious hiding-places, the foliage of a tree or long grass, the faces began to emerge from the background. But the contour lines and the colouring of the map told him nothing.

There were more signs of activity now on board. Passengers began to cluster on deck, bringing hand luggage from the stifling little cabins where they had spent a restless night. By a stroke of luck, David had found himself sharing a cabin with a youngish Government official named Apps, who was in the Health Department of Cyprus. Apps was returning from a conference on malaria control in Beirut. He was an affable enough fellow, slightly tinged with the Colonial Office mentality that divided the human race into two categories—those fortunate enough to hold an official position, and the rest. David had put himself out to be pleasant to his temporary cabin-mate, as soon as he learned his occupation. A friend in the Health Department, who would know all the doctors on the island, was worth having.

At this point Apps came up and joined David, leaning over the rails. 'Well, there she is,' he said. 'Should be in in half an hour. You staying in Famagusta?'

'No, I've got to get on to Nicosia.'

'So've I. What'll you do—hire a car?'

'Well, I hope our local manager will have sent a car for me. He's been asked to.'

Apps looked at David with increased respect. He had thought of him as some kind of commercial traveller but the fact that he rated a car made him seem more important.

'I wonder if I could cadge a lift,' he said. 'There may be some Government transport going back but they won't have sent a car especially for me. I didn't warn them when

I'd be back.' He might have added that he would still not have been met by car, had he done so. He was too junior to rate an official car to himself.

'I'd be delighted to give you a lift,' David said, 'providing the car does turn up.'

'Here's hoping, anyway. You said this was your first visit to Cyprus?'

'Yes.'

'You should like it. It's getting a bit overrun by the military, of course—there's some talk that they're going to make it the new Middle East base. Mind you, I don't dislike the Army—in its proper place. But anyone would think they own the island the way they carry on sometimes. Were you in the last show?'

'Yes.'

'So was I. I was a gunner. What were you in?'

David was ready for the question. He had decided to put himself over as a mild, industrious type, keen to get on in his job, a man to whom violent action of any sort was repugnant. So that, if Knelle were to die suddenly and an inquiry was held, no one would suspect a non-belligerent character like the travelling inspector of Eximport Limited.

'Oh, nothing very much. I happened to be pretty good at figures, so I went into the Pay Corps.'

'Oh,' said Apps. There was an awkward silence which he covered up by adding, 'I wouldn't call that nothing much. Most important branch of the service, the good old Pay Corps. Where would we have been without them?'

David was enjoying the other's embarrassment. 'I'd have liked to do something a bit more active,' he said wistfully, 'but the doctors spotted I'd got an enlarged heart. Nothing serious but it meant I couldn't get into a combatant job.'

'Damn' shame,' Apps said heartily. His opinion of

David rose by a degree or two but it was obvious that David would never quite qualify for the ranks of 'regular fellows'.

They were now close enough to the shore to pick out objects on land. Apps began to give a running commentary. 'See that sort of tower,' he said. 'That's called Othello's Tower. He was supposed to be Governor of Cyprus, you know, under the Venetians. That's where he must have bumped off what's her name. "Put out the light and then put out thy light"—how does it go? I don't usually quote Shakespeare before breakfast but that was one of our set books for School Cert. You see that cathedral with the spires? Well, if you look closely, you can spot something odd built on the far end. Can you see it? It's a minaret. Yes, that sausage-shaped affair there. When the Turks took over the island, they found dozens of these churches built by the Crusaders. There were supposed to be something like a thousand in Famagusta alone. Most of them were left to fall into ruin but the two cathedrals, here and in Nicosia, were taken over by the Turks as mosques. All they did was to knock out the stained-glass windows—Moslems don't allow pictures of human beings or angels in their mosques—and build a minaret on one end. Simple.'

He rambled on. David began to take a liking to him. Apps was one of those uncomplicated men who could make friends on sight with most humans and dogs. He was probably good enough at his job, David decided, and he was not a fool. But he was insensitive to atmosphere and so made an ideal travelling companion, as long as the journey did not last too long. He had now begun a monologue on the sponge-fishing industry of Cyprus. David, listening with half an ear and occasionally throwing in a yes or a no, hoped to squeeze him as dry of information as the sponges he was describing.

There was a bustle on board as the ship eased gently against the quay. Barefoot Lebanese sailors scurried to and fro, securing ropes and lowering the gangplanks. The massed caiques in the harbour rocked with the waves of the ship's arrival and the spears of their masts tossed like a copse of fir-trees in a high wind. There were cars parked under the high grey wall of Famagusta and a string of camels lolloped past. A port official followed by two swarthy policemen in the blue uniforms that recalled the London 'bobbies' came up the gangway.

A quarter of an hour later, when the formalities of disembarking were over, David stood at the bottom of the gangway. Apps, who had gone ahead, was chatting to a handsome little Cypriot with dark eyes and a pencil-line of a moustache. 'We're in luck,' he said as David arrived. 'This is your driver—and here's the limousine.' He pointed to a large shooting brake parked by the wall. 'Quite a car. Your firm must be doing all right.'

David grinned. 'My name is Flint,' he said to the driver. 'What's yours? Do you speak English?' he added as an afterthought.

'Petrides, sir,' said the driver. 'I speak English but not good.'

'Better than I speak Greek—which I don't,' David replied. 'Well, what's the form now?'

Apps cut in. 'With that job we'll make Nicosia in under an hour and a half, won't we?' He threw a questioning look at the driver who nodded and flashed a set of very white teeth. 'These boys drive like a bat out of hell,' he explained to David. 'Unless you're in a real hurry, I vote we go and have breakfast at the King George—that's a nice little hotel right on the beach—and then push on. What do you say?'

'Sounds fine. It's a bit too cold for a swim, I suppose?'

Apps gave a mock shiver. 'Probably warmer than on a

midsummer day in England but I'm pampered these days. I wait till it's approaching the temperature of bathwater—about July.'

They drove the short distance to the King George Hotel, past the old walled city and through the tree-shaded suburb. There were neat white and red bungalows set back in their own gardens and on the street corners were scarlet letter-boxes with the Royal cipher on them. Traffic kept to the left of the road and the cars were popular British makes, Austins and Morrises. David felt nostalgic. Apart from the clear light and the hot pressure of the sun—and the occasional camel or donkey in the lanes—this might have been a corner of Welwyn Garden City transplanted to the exotic Mediterranean coast.

They breakfasted at the King George Hotel. In spite of his short stay in Cairo, David had not yet got used to the idea that he could order what he fancied—and get it. He gazed at the two fried eggs nestling against the thick rashers of crisp bacon on his plate and then looked out at the curving strip of beach just under the veranda, silvery-white in the glare of the sun, and the aquamarine sea that hugged it with hardly a ripple or a wrinkle. But for one thought, he felt he was going to enjoy Cyprus.

They climbed into the car and set off for Nicosia. They sped past orange groves, each with its wind pump, like an aeroplane propeller stuck on a high post, whirling away; the road which was a well-surfaced macadam dipped and twisted down to the plain which spread out for more than twenty miles on either side of them. To their right the jagged mountain range along the north coast was a misty blue. Occasionally they passed a small village with its whitewashed church and white cottages. Swarthy men in baggy trousers and high leather boots like Wellingtons lolled on chairs under a woven grass canopy and stared incuriously at the car as it raced by. In every village there

would be scrawny chickens pecking away at the dust and thin dogs that scampered and snapped at the retreating car. Sometimes they saw a lone man ploughing the dusty fields with a team that might be two oxen, or an ox and a mule. Although the morning was still young there was an air of peaceful somnolence about the island and David remarked on it.

‘Appearances can deceive, old boy,’ Apps replied. ‘Do you notice all those farm-carts painted blue? And that blue and white flag over there?’ He pointed it out. ‘That’s the Greek flag. Cyprus has been overrun by the Crusaders, the Venetians, the Turks and now us but, deep down, every true Cypriot looks on himself as more Greek than the Greeks. Get them going on their local *ouzo* and any one of them will tell you he’s descended straight from Achilles or some other old hero. The island was in a hell of a way when we took over years back, I believe. It had gone to pot under the Turks and the local people were lazy bastards. They just lived on their goats and let ’em run wild over the island. The goats ate all the vegetation and the plain here was turning into a dust-bowl. There was no proper irrigation and the stagnant water just bred the good old anopheles mosquito. We’ve done a hell of a lot for them. Planted millions of fir trees on Mount Olympus to bind the soil and increase rainfall. Given them irrigation channels and, with the help of the Army, wiped out the worst malarial districts in the Panhandle. Cleaned up the moneylending racket, too, and at one time nine out of every ten peasants were owned body and soul by the tenth, who was the moneylender. But d’you think they’re grateful? Not on your bloody life. All they want is “enosis”—union with Greece. We offered them a representative government but they wouldn’t have it. They just won’t admit that we’ve a right here anyway.’

‘They look peaceful enough,’ David remarked.

‘Yes, on the surface. And deep down most of them know privately which side their bread’s buttered on. But they’re too bloody proud to admit it. And they’re like most of these Mediterranean types. They look placid, sure, but every now and then they can flare up with a vengeance. Why, in 1931, they rioted and burnt down Government House.’

He went on to describe the political set-up, how the AKEL party, which was Communist, dominated the local municipalities and occasionally stirred up trouble. The sight of a village priest, a tall man, with a noble bushy beard, who was dressed in black robes and the Greek Orthodox stove-pipe hat of the clergy, incongruously astride a small donkey, sent Apps off into a monologue on how the clergy played politics and aspired to power. David took it all in. This was a useful briefing for him. He wanted to slip easily into the background of Cyprus and not stick out like the newcomer he was.

Apps rambled on. A willing listener seemed to hypnotize him into greater fluency. ‘Oh, yes, they look peaceful enough. But do you know, per head of population, the murder rate here is as high as Chicago?’ He glanced at David. ‘That shook you, I bet. They sometimes call this the Island of Love because there’s an old legend that Aphrodite—you know, the one who rose from the waves—hove to off the west coast of Cyprus. Island of love—that’s a pretty apt description. The V.D. rate is the highest in the Mediterranean. I ought to know, my department handles the statistics.’

‘Talking of murders,’ said David, ‘do they catch them all? The murderers, I mean.’

‘Oh, yes, the police are pretty efficient. The Commissioner and the Assistant Commissioner are British, of course, and so are several of the other senior officers. Mind you, the killings are pretty obvious. Not much

finesse. It's usually a case of "cherchez la femme", I gather. In the Greek Orthodox way of looking at it, an engagement's just as binding as marriage. In fact, they get engaged and often wait until the girl's a few months pregnant before they get married. Sort of insurance policy against barrenness. Well, what happens is the young man gets engaged, does his stuff and then cools off. The girl's papa can't stand the insult to her honour and so he gets in a ditch with his gun and blows off the young man's head when he walks past. Then the old boy takes to the mountains as a bandit and sooner or later the police round him up. It's usually as simple as that. You don't need Sherlock Holmes on these open and shut cases. But take a tip, old boy—be careful how you play around with the local talent. Their fathers and brothers can be dynamite!' He guffawed.

Petrides, the driver, kept the station waggon cruising at about sixty miles an hour. There was not much traffic on the road to Nicosia, an occasional Army lorry and sometimes a local bus, painted scarlet and crammed to the roof with Cypriots, their livestock and their bundles of food. The station waggon rolled smoothly past them all and the handsome driver whose grave face reminded David of some half-forgotten hero of silent films seemed oblivious to the conversation going on behind him as he held the big car on the crown of the narrow road. David wondered if he was listening to Apps's comments on his island and his people. But if he were, his impassive features gave no sign of his thoughts. He was a man to watch and, if possible, make friends with, David decided. For the job to come he could be equally useful or dangerous.

They swept past the derelict airfield at Timbou and, breasting a rise in the road, caught a glimpse of Nicosia some miles ahead. It seemed to dance in the heat haze of the morning and the illusion was increased by the spires

of the one-time Gothic cathedral that made the city seem more like a ship riding at anchor in the waves of the rolling plain.

'Journey's end in sight,' Apps said. 'We ought to be in town in about quarter of an hour at this rate.' He glanced at his watch. 'Five to eleven. They'll hardly expect me to report in before lunch.'

'Can we drop you anywhere?' David asked.

'Well, that's decent of you. But don't let me upset your plans. What's your next move?'

'I've just got to report to a Mr. Hassan—he's our local manager.'

'Hassan? Oh, you're with his crowd, are you?'

'You know him then?'

'Know him? Everyone in the island knows the Terrible Turk. He's a great character. The old Turkish janissaries who ran the island before we took over were supposed to have brought a lot of Nubian slaves with them. They say that Hassan is descended from one of the slave-families. I can't quite see how that works out. The slaves were all eunuchs, according to popular rumour. So is Hassan himself, if the same rumour is true.'

'What kind of chap is he?'

'You'll find out. I won't spoil the fun by trying to describe him.'

Soon they came down a long shallow hill and turned with the road that circled the walled city of Nicosia. Apps pointed out the thick grey walls with their arrow-slits high up on the battlements and the dried-up moat in which leafy trees now grew. They made a half-circle around the wall and then Apps directed the driver to turn left up a side road. The neat houses and bungalows, each half-hidden by its own hedge, reminded David again of some English suburb, comfortable and a little snug. As the car pulled up at Apps's nod, David could even see the

entrance of a football stadium a short distance up the road.

'The Secretariat—that's the Government offices—is only half a mile further on,' Apps said, as he leaned back to pick up his bags. 'Pretty convenient for me. I share this bungalow with another Government chap who's unmarried. Pity you couldn't join us but unfortunately it's Government property and they won't let the lesser breeds'—he laughed—'use it. Would you care for a drink?'

'Better not, thanks all the same,' David said. 'I'm supposed to report in as soon as I get here. Don't want to start off on the wrong foot.'

'Fair enough.' Apps got out of the station waggon. 'Well, I'm bound to see you around. In the English Club or one of the honky-tonks. Thanks for the lift.' He strode off through the gate to his bungalow.

Petrides turned to David. 'We go to the office now, yes?'

'Yes, please,' said David.

Petrides reversed the station waggon and then drove back towards Nicosia. They swung over a broad bridge that crossed the moat and then edged down a succession of narrow streets. Shopkeepers sat on low stools in the doorways, smoking and gazing blankly at the bustle around them. Boys on bicycles darted to and fro with a violent ringing of bells. There were donkeys and carts to add to the confusion and lorries that swung out of side-turnings without warning. Petrides eased the car further into the labyrinth of streets until they came to a small square where he drew up. 'We are arrived,' he said superfluously.

'Would you wait for me, please,' David said. 'I'd better leave my luggage here for the time being.'

He got out and stretched himself. It was curiously quiet in the square after the din of the narrow streets. The doorway of the office was open but a curtain of beads on string

hung in the opening to let in the air but keep out the violent sun. David plunged through and stood in the doorway for a moment while his eyes reacted to the apparent gloom inside. Soon he could pick out a row of desks behind a low wooden railing. There were three or four Cypriot clerks working away behind them. They barely looked up at the visitor and then lowered their heads to their paper-work. David was suddenly reminded of the atmosphere of the London office he had left so recently. Several thousand miles away in a land of sunlight and gaiety Stern's influence could be felt. He nearly laughed out loud.

A black-haired girl whose sallow face and neck seemed to sit incongruously above her neat flowered dress came forward.

'My name's Flint,' said David. 'I think Mr. Hassan is expecting me.'

'Yes, you are expected,' she replied gravely. 'Would you wait here, please. I will find out whether he can see you now.'

She disappeared through a side door and returned perhaps a minute later. 'Would you come this way, please,' she said.

David followed her down a short corridor and then stood back as she tapped on a door, opened it and said 'Mr. Flint' and then retreated a step or two to let David go past her. He nodded, smiled and walked through the open door.

The room was quite small and the man reclining on a sofa against one wall made it appear smaller still. He was huge and grotesquely fat, fatter than anyone David had ever seen before. Only the skin on the crown of his shaven head was not bulging with fat. From that point downwards his body swept out in ever more voluminous curves to a waist that must have been seventy or eighty inches in

circumference. His eyes were half-hidden behind bulges of flesh that rippled down to his chin and submerged it into his neck and shoulders. One great arm, as thick as a normal man's thigh, hung down by his side. The other was suspended over an open box of chocolates on a small low table beside the sofa. The proud curve of his belly strained against his white drill trousers and a broad leather belt around his waist was almost covered by the waves of fat that threatened to swamp it from either side.

Apart from his great girth, he was black. The expanses of skin in his face and chest that showed through the open-necked white shirt and his cylindrical arins that stretched his short sleeves were shiny and black, like the back of a seal emerging from the water. He smiled at David and a gold tooth flashed; almost like a searchlight on a dark night, David thought. Hassan's features were hard to pick out from behind the enveloping flesh but they appeared to be regular, without the flattened nose and thick lips of the negro.

'Please take a seat, Mr. Flint,' he said. He spoke in a soft squeaky voice that seemed all wrong in a man of his size. David would have expected a deep growl to come from that mountain of flesh.

'You must forgive me if I do not rise to greet you. For years I have been reserving my energy for some big occasion. It has been so long in presenting itself that my energy must have died of boredom.' He tittered softly and his whole body shook with underground mirth.

David pulled up an armchair and sat down. Hassan indicated the open box on the side table and asked, 'Would you care for a chocolate?'

'No, thank you,' David said.

'You will excuse me if I do?' A bunch of sausage-like fingers pawed at the box and picked out a chocolate. David watched them in fascination as they delicately

removed the wrapping and then popped the chocolate into the gaping mouth. 'Sweets,' Hassan went on, 'my last remaining luxury. When a man reaches my age and my size, the pleasures of life disappear, one by one. All except the pleasure of eating. That remains to the end, if Allah in his inscrutable wisdom continues to grant me a good digestion.'

His hand was groping towards the box again, when a servant shuffled in through a side door, carrying a tray with two tiny cups of Turkish coffee and two glasses of water. He approached noiselessly across the thick Turkish rugs on the floor, placed the tray within Hassan's reach on the table, and then bowed. Hassan dismissed him with a wave of one fat hand. The man bowed again and went out without a word or a sound, except the shuffling of his sandals.

One coffee cup almost disappeared as Hassan's great paw held it to his lips. He sipped slowly with a smacking of his lips. He put the cup back on its fragile saucer and looked at David. There was a glint in his eyes as they peered out from behind their bulwarks of black flesh.

'So you have come to kill the stranger in our midst,' he remarked softly.

David nearly dropped his coffee cup. 'How do you know?' he asked. 'It's supposed to be secret.'

'So it is. Quite secret. But the head of our great Company, Mr. Sterner, has seen fit to entrust the secret to me as well. He knows that this may be the last stage of your journey. When the huntsman is closing in on the wild boar, it is as well that the beater knows what is to happen. You are the huntsman, I am the beater. Not a very active beater, perhaps,' he giggled, 'but, like the Most High, our Chairman has to use the poor instruments that happen to be on hand for his purposes.' He saw the uncertain look on David's face and added, 'Do not worry, Mr. Flint,

please. I can remember the days of the janissaries when an indiscreet servant was liable to have his tongue cut out. I may talk a lot—talking is one of the harmless pleasures left to a fat old man—but I do not give away the important things, least of all, when I am an accessory to them.’

‘Where is Knelle now?’ David asked.

Hassan gave a massive shrug. ‘That, unfortunately, we do not know. Yet. But before I tell you what little I know, perhaps you would read this letter which, as you see, has not been opened. It is addressed to you and it came by airmail.’ He picked a crumpled flimsy envelope out of his breast pocket and handed it over. David saw his name on it and the words ‘Strictly Private’ heavily underlined. There was an unbroken blob of sealing wax over the flap with the Company seal impressed on it. He tore open the envelope and read the letter. It was short and direct.

‘Dear Flint,’ it began. ‘My old friend, Ahmet Hassan, will hand this letter to you. Do not be put off by his size and his manner. He likes to play the buffoon but do not underrate him. He is extremely clever and shrewd and quite ruthless when he needs to be. You can rely on him absolutely. I have sent him all the up-to-date information on our special assignment and he will pass it on to you. I am sorry we have not yet found out more facts for you but we are working on it all the time. Hassan also knows about and will organize our financial arrangement. You will of course let me know how you get on. Meanwhile, take care of yourself. With all good wishes, Daniel Sterner.’

When David looked up, Hassan said, ‘Would you like me to burn that letter?’

David nodded and handed it over. Hassan twisted it into a rough spill, took a lighter from a side pocket and flicked the flame against the edge of the thin paper. When it had crumpled into a black husk he dropped it into a brass ash-tray and then crushed the ashes into powder. ‘I

have done the same to the papers I was sent,' he said. 'It is harder to read a man's mind than to read a document he leaves lying around. Now let me tell you what I know.'

'Knelle is thought to be in Cyprus. I say "thought" for no one has seen him, no one could recognize him from the vague description we have. When you flew out to Cairo a week or so ago, he was thought to be there. And so he may have been—for a day or two. But Mr. Sterner now thinks that Knelle may have reached Cyprus and stayed here many months ago, using the island as his base. Although we are surrounded by sea, we are a springboard here for any part of the Middle East. And with all the caiques plying to and fro and with some of the captains ready to smuggle anything in or out of the island, it would be possible for a clever man to come and go at any time. Mr. Sterner's continental organization, since you left, came across a German medical man who had known Knelle towards the end of the war, when it was obvious that the Germans were going to lose. This other doctor heard it rumoured that, if the worst came to the worst and Knelle was likely to be called to account for his actions, he would get away and make for Cyprus.'

'Why Cyprus?' asked David. 'Why not South America or Spain? Isn't that where all good Nazis go?'

'Who can tell the patterns and compulsions in a man's mind? We are not dealing with an orthodox criminal who does the obvious.'

'So what it boils down to,' David said, 'is this. Knelle may be here—or somewhere else. If he's here, he may have arrived years, months or even weeks ago. We don't really know what he looks like in any detail and we don't know what he's doing. He could be in practice next door to this place, under an assumed name, or he could be in Timbuctoo. That's about it, isn't it?'

'Not quite. We now know that he has a small scar on

the inside of his left wrist. A German medical orderly turned up that piece of news.'

David laughed sharply. 'That makes it perfect. All we have to do is arrange with the Governor to issue an instruction for all males over the age of twenty-one to line up and hold out their left arms. Then we just inspect them all and nab Knelle. Except that he's probably not on the island at all.'

'If I may say so without offence, you are making rather a fuss about it, Mr. Flint. Are you in such a hurry to kill him?'

David went red. 'No, not really. You see, it's not a job that I fancy a great deal and I'd like to get it over with.'

'Spoken like an honest man, Mr. Flint. Killing in cold blood is never easy—to start with. After a while, like everything else, it becomes a habit. I know. In my time I have had to kill seventeen different men on various occasions. But you do not want to listen to the idle ramblings of a conceited old man who lives in the past. Let me tell you the financial arrangements we have worked out for you.'

He eased himself by laborious stages off the sofa and rolled over to a corner of the room. Pulling aside a tapestry with one hand and reaching for a bunch of keys in a side pocket with the other, he opened up a wall safe. 'In this safe,' he said over his shoulder, 'is about a thousand pounds in various Middle East currencies. It is for you—in case you need it in a hurry.' He removed a wad of notes, shut the safe, let the tapestry slip back into place and waddled back to the sofa, subsiding on it with a grunt of pleasure. 'Here,' he said, tossing the bundle on to the table, 'is fifty pounds in Cyprus money. Something to be getting on with. Whenever you need more money, just come to me for it. That will be less complicated than opening up an account for you with a bank. Banking

accounts are a nuisance if one has to leave a place in a hurry. It could throw suspicion on a man if he disappeared and forgot to close a substantial account with a local bank.'

David picked up the notes and slipped them into an inside pocket. Hassan went on, 'Also in that safe are some securities, shares in the Company which Mr. Sterner sent out by airmail. They belong to you, of course. If and when your job is done and you are about to deprive us of the pleasure of your presence, you are to let me know your next port of call. I then airmail back the securities to Mr. Sterner and he arranges with the nearest branch office for the sum of twenty thousand pounds to be credited to your account in the local bank.'

'What about currency regulations?' David asked.

'Just leave that to us. Regulations were made to be got around.' Hassan grinned with a flash of gold. 'You are quite an expensive young man—or else prices in your business have risen, like everything else, since the war. I can recall the days when one could hire a killer for a few shillings.'

The bantering touched David on a raw spot. 'I am not a professional killer,' he said. 'I told you I don't particularly like this job. I'm only attempting it to help Mr. Sterner out.'

'And help yourself to a nice little sum of money as well. But we must not quarrel over motives. The thing is to find our Mr. Knelle and then decide how to dispose of him. Can you drive a car?'

'Yes. I haven't driven for nearly a year but it wouldn't take me long to pick it up again. I hold an English driving licence.'

'Splendid. That will be valid here, of course. I suggest you spend a few days getting acquainted with the island. Better take Petrides, the man who drove you up today,

with you—at any rate to start with. He knows the island well and is a good driver. He is also very discreet. In the meantime we shall go on looking for the German.'

'Where shall I stay?'

'For the next few days I have booked you in at the Olympus Hotel here in Nicosia. It is a quiet, comfortable hotel. We are hiring a bungalow for you, which should be ready in a week. You can then move in. It will be easier for you, I think, to enter and leave a private house at odd hours, if you have to. Even the best hotel servants are apt to gossip about a visitor who comes and goes at strange times.'

David nodded. Hassan might be an evil old monstrosity who took pleasure in needling his guest but he was obviously efficient at organizing this strange mission. 'That seems okay,' he said. 'Do you want me to report to you every day?'

'Not necessarily every day. Whenever you go out of Nicosia, I would like you to let me know your whereabouts so that I can get in touch with you in a hurry. In two or three months it will be getting rather hot here in the plain. The temperature rises to over a hundred degrees in the shade at midday. You may then want to make your headquarters in Troodos—up in the mountains—or at Kyrenia perhaps. That wouldn't matter, as long as we are in touch with each other.'

'Two or three months? You think the job may take that long?'

Hassan shrugged his huge shoulders. 'Who can tell? A few months—or a few days. Or not at all, perhaps. At any rate, here in Cyprus. It will be as Allah wills it.'

David rose. 'Well, if you have nothing else for me at the moment, I'd like to get along to this hotel and have a wash and a change. I've been travelling in these clothes since I left Cairo.'

'Of course, Mr. Flint.' Hassan oozed to his feet and stretched his clumsy bulk. As he did so, he bumped into the side table and a coffee cup fell off. It never hit the floor. In a movement so fast that David could hardly follow it, Hassan stooped and caught the cup, picking it out of the air with one swift clutch of his hand. David blinked. So this ponderous slow motion was just an act. The big Turk could move as fast as anyone, faster than a trained athlete, when he had to. Cunning old so-and-so, David thought. Had me fooled with all that grunting and wheezing. He felt a new respect for his host.

Hassan looked as sheepish as the black curves of his face would allow. 'A mistake, Mr. Flint,' he said softly. 'What you would call a fluke, I think.'

'Fluke nothing. You ought to be playing in the slips for England.'

'In the slips? Oh, you mean that strange game called cricket. We Orientals, Mr. Flint, have something better to do with our precious leisure than hit a round piece of leather with a straight bit of wood.' He put the cup gently back on to the table. 'Perhaps you would give me the honour of dining with me tonight. At the English Club. Please do not look surprised. I have been an honorary Englishman for some time now. What did your English poet, Blake, say? "And I am black but O my soul is white." He struck an attitude and gave a neighing giggle. David felt cold in spite of the warm room.

Hassan placed both his hands on his forehead and bowed low in an Eastern gesture. 'Till tonight then, Mr. Flint. Petrides is at your disposal, whenever you want him. You have but to ask and if the thing is within our humble means, it is yours.' He bowed again as his visitor left the room but David could see the glint of mischief in his eyes that spoiled the obsequious pose. Hassan would need watching, he decided.

For the next fortnight he scoured the island in the station waggon. He visited Kyrenia, the seaside resort seventeen miles north of Nicosia on the other side of the jagged mountain range that emphasized the north coastline. He found it a last outpost of the British Empire. Retired generals and their ladies quarrelled genteelly over the bridge tables in the afternoon and discussed the scandals that had rocked Poona and Lucknow before the First World War. There was even a hotel, run by a retired butler and his wife, which served afternoon teas on Worcester china with Cooper's Oxford marmalade in dishes and Earl Grey tea in the pot. The atmosphere of Cheltenham or Eastbourne seemed incongruous against a background of the fishermen's white cottages, the squat castle that brooded on the water's edge, the harbour with its caiques, and, back on the mountains, the ruined profile of St. Hilarion castle rearing against the skyline like a picture from a child's fairy story.

From Kyrenia David drove east and west in turn along the coast road; eastwards past Buffavento, another ruined Crusader stronghold perched on the mountain edge, and Pentadaktylos, the 'Five Fingers', a mountain crest that looked like the knuckles of a giant clenched fist. Eastwards in a wide detour to Famagusta, taking in the ruins of Salamis on the way, a turning-point in history that was now only a few marble columns overthrown and half-embedded in the undergrowth, a hiding-place for lizards. In Famagusta itself he wandered on foot—the narrow mediæval gateway through the walled city and the winding maze of streets were unsuited to a broad-based station waggon. He saw the ruined churches of the Crusaders and the Gothic cathedral that had become a Turkish mosque. Removing his shoes, he entered the

mosque; the oriel windows were now of plain glass and where the Crusaders had devoutly followed the Stations of the Cross, the images had been torn away by the Moslems. The plastered walls now carried arabesques, weird squiggles of paint that were meaningless to David's Western eyes.

Completing the southward sweep of the circle, David drove past the military camp at Dhekelia, the guard hut and the perimeter wire surrounding the wooden huts on the edge of the sea. He heard the still call of 'Cookhouse' on the bugle and for a moment he felt a tug of nostalgia. The uncomplicated life of the Army, doing what you were told unthinkingly and passing on the orders to others, the easy fellowship of the mess, were so different from this lonely, intricate mission where he would have to think for himself—and perhaps think fast. On he drove, past the salt flats of Larnaca that glittered with a blinding glare in the strong sun, and northwards again back to Nicosia, along a road that switchbacked across bare chalk hills.

Another trip that took three days covered the westward half of the island. Out of Nicosia past the airfield, racing across the plain to the foothills; then climbing a road that corkscrewed upwards through the forests, where villages clung to the side of the mountain and their fruit trees and terraced gardens seemed to hang out over space. Beyond the derelict mine-workings hacked out of sheer cliffs to Troodos, a village that was the highest inhabited point of the island. Six thousand feet up and only the blunt peak of tree-covered Mount Olympus above it. The air was thin and clear here; at night thick clothing was worn and log fires blazed in the grates. Thirty miles away and several thousand feet below, electric fans and iced drinks were making the heat of early summer bearable. They were not required up here.

Down from the mountain top he drove along hairpin

bends through the forest to Platres, a holiday resort on a shelf on the mountainside. On the way Petrides pointed out with a vague wave of his hand the approximate whereabouts of the lonely monastery at Kykkos, high among the fir trees. The only way of approaching it was along a twisting mud road with a sheer drop of several thousand feet on one side. The monks could see a car approaching many minutes before it arrived. Petrides, who had the typical Cypriot's reverence for and realism about the workings of the Greek Orthodox Church, added with a grin that Kykkos Monastery had obvious advantages for the outlaw who took to the hills. It was rumoured that several outlaws had found sanctuary in the quiet monastic cells while the hue and cry was on. A couple of years before, one of them had been captured by the police who found a loaf of newly baked bread in his knapsack. Certain peculiarities about it showed that the bread could only have been baked at the monastery. 'There was no proof that the monks had helped him, of course,' said Petrides. 'He could have stolen ~~the bread~~—perhaps. But it would take a very clever man to get into the monastery unobserved, steal a loaf of bread and get away again. More likely that the monks gave him—what do you call it, sir?'

'Sanctuary,' David suggested.

'Yes, thank you, sanctuary. Who can blame them? The Church teaches that we should look after the wanderer and the homeless. Besides, the monks are very poor—and they have to live. An outlaw who could pay for his lodging would be made welcome.' He grinned with a flash of white teeth. 'Yes, a man could lie hidden in Kykkos for a long, long time.'

David thought about this as the station waggon waltzed and swung down the twisting bends of the road. It was just possible, he thought. Hardly likely, perhaps,

for a foreigner and a complete stranger to seek sanctuary there but just worth investigating. He made a mental note of it.

On they went to Paphos, a small port on the extreme south-west tip of the island. Then back along the coast road to Limassol, possibly the most thriving and certainly the most unattractive town in Cyprus. It possessed factories where the local cheap and drinkable wines were bottled and also that brandy which Sanders in Cairo had mentioned—Hajjipavlou. There was a factory for processing the carob bean, that all-purpose growth of the Mediterranean. The carob was black and hard, rather like a shrivelled and mummified banana to look at. Its outer surface was treated and made into some kind of plastic for motor-car fittings, Petrides told David. The fibres on the inside were removed and woven into material. The sticky pulp of the bean that remained was further subdivided. The stickiness was transformed into glue and the sugary extract became sweetening essence for jams and confectionery. Anything left over was chopped up and made into cattle cake. Truly a useful bean for a utilitarian world. The sweet stench coming from the carob factories seemed to follow the station waggon as it raced eastwards along the coast road back towards Nicosia.

On the way they passed another monastery, built on the tip of a high hill that rose abruptly from the plain. Petrides explained that this was the stronghold of a breakaway sect that defied modernity and clung to the outmoded Julian calendar, with the result that its upholders celebrated Christmas and Easter and the other church holidays eleven days after the rest of the world. They had refused to be cheated out of their eleven days by the calendar reforms in the eighteenth century. These strong-minded monks were a thorn in the side of orthodox believers and a trial to the Archbishop of the Island,

who had tried persuasion, direct orders and threats of excommunication on them without success. Let the rest of the world agree that tomorrow was Easter Day. The monks knew better; Easter was still more than a week and a half away.

And so back to Nicosia. David began to feel that he was getting to know Cyprus. Place-names on a map had become reality. He knew the terrain and the time it would take to go from one place to another. During the journeys he had begun to share the driving with Petrides and felt that he could now handle the powerful station waggon with ease. He had also picked up scraps of local gossip from the swarthy Cypriot and was learning to understand the mentality of the islanders. He had come to like Petrides who was polite and friendly, naïve in many of his observations but shrewd and possessed of a strange dignity. Although Petrides had never left Cyprus, except for a few months in Italy during the war when he had been with a mule company of the Cyprus Regiment, he followed world affairs avidly in the local papers. He discussed with David whether Mr. Truman would be re-elected and whether the interminable conferences of foreign ministers would ever show results. Petrides had a brother who worked in a Greek café off the Tottenham Court Road in London. One day he hoped to join his brother; perhaps the two of them would start up a café of their own. He asked David questions about London. Was it very much bigger than Nicosia? How did they get air into the Underground tunnels? Had David seen Mr. Churchill? David was on the point of asking why, if the Cypriots were so keen on union with Greece, many of them should emigrate to London and, once settled in, send for their relatives. But he decided not to. He did not want to offend the sensitive little man, who might prove a useful ally in need.

All this time David was getting himself back into physical trim. The months he had spent in London at Eximport, huddled over a desk, stocking up with starchy food that was the cheapest way of staving off hunger, taking no exercise, had left his muscles slack and his body soft. Now he took the opportunity of walking whenever he could, scrambling up the mountainsides for a better view when the station waggon pulled up. If they came to a quiet cove on the coast road, he would stop the car, undress and plunge into the warm sea, swimming out perhaps half a mile and back, all the while that Petrides dozed at the wheel of the car. He could not understand the madness of the English. He watched David sceptically as he ran up and down the beach to dry himself in the sun or did pressups on the hot sand. It was surely more comfortable to sit on a soft seat in the shade. But as his muscles hardened and his reactions became quick again, David began to feel more mentally confident and resolved. His mind was toughening along with his body. He was getting ready, impatient, in fact, to tackle Knelle.

Hassan had no news for him. The organization was still scouring the island methodically but there was no trace of Knelle. The names of all new arrivals to the island for the past year were being checked for their present whereabouts but it was a long, slow job. And, as Hassan had pointed out at their first meeting, there was no guarantee that Knelle, if he had in fact come to Cyprus, had entered in an orthodox manner so that his arrival could be registered. Hassan had an Oriental patience; he was prepared to wait indefinitely for news. But David wanted to get on and finish the job. He decided to play the detective himself. It would be a feather in his cap if he could outwit Hassan and his organization of searchers, and find Knelle single-handed.

He remembered what Sterner had said to him back in

London; that a doctor would not be parted for ever from his medicine. David knew that Apps often made a round of the Nicosia 'honky-tonks', the open-air restaurants where there was dancing and a cabaret, late at night for a final drink or two before going back to bed. If he could contrive to bump into Apps, as if by accident, one night, he might pick up a clue on any new doctors who had recently set up practice in the island. It was a pretty obvious move, he realized, but it was just possible that Hassan had been too subtle to hit on the obvious.

So David took to frequenting the two or three honky-tonks where Apps might be expected to call. It was quite pleasant to lean against the bar in the cool night air, sipping a brandy and soda and watching the couples shuffling round the slippery stone dance floor. The dancers were mostly young Army officers with nurses from the local military hospital or Government officials and their wives. There were one or two Cypriot girls, some of them lovely in a dark, grave way. But he remembered Apps's warning about tangling with the local talent. He wanted no unnecessary complications in this already complicated business. He turned regretfully back to the bar and ordered another brandy and soda.

On the third night he bumped into Apps, who was in the middle of telling a dirty joke to two other men. One of them was an Army major, who was named Collings. Apps introduced him as an old friend from Army days. He looked vaguely familiar to David who dismissed the thought. He knew that there was a certain type of Regular Army officer and different specimens with their straight features and clipped moustaches looked very like one another when in uniform. The other man, whose name David did not catch, was a colonial official like Apps.

Collings turned to David. 'I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch your name.'

'Flint.'

'Flint? Haven't we met before somewhere?

'I don't think so,' David said. As he spoke, the thought that they had indeed met came to him more strongly. He determined to bluff it out.

Collings looked puzzled. 'I'd have sworn that I'd seen you somewhere. Let me think now. In Italy, would it be? Were you in Italy during the war?'

'Yes, but only just. I was stationed in Naples for a while.'

'It could have been Naples. But I don't think so. My battery was doing close support work for a time with some parachutists—Special Air Service chaps—and somehow I associate you with them.'

David remembered now. He suddenly recognized the gunner captain, as Collings had then been, who had been present at operation orders. Hell, he thought, I've got to keep bluffing now. 'I'm sorry,' he was beginning to say when Apps came blundering to the rescue.

'Couldn't have been our David, could it, old chap?' he said. 'David was doing work of national importance back in Naples. Keeping an eye on the money-bags and dishing it out to the troops.' He made a gesture with his hands, like a man dealing out a pack of cards.

Collings looked puzzled and David followed up the advantage. 'That's so,' he said. 'I was in the Pay Corps in Naples. Never got that close to the rough stuff—thank God.' He tittered in his new-found role of base-wallah. 'Could I buy you chaps a drink?'

Collings still looked puzzled. 'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I must have mixed you up with another fellow I met. Amazing likeness, though. You didn't have a brother or some relation serving with the S.A.S.?'

'No,' David said decisively.

'Ah, well. You must have a double somewhere—that's

all. I could have sworn it was you—and I usually have a pretty good memory for faces. Well, let's skip it anyway.' .
11 David felt relieved as he turned to the bar to order a new round of drinks. It had been a close thing. It would have been damned awkward if Collings had persisted and made him acknowledge the truth. He could not afford to be known as a man who had done some fighting in his time.

Fortunately Collings began to chat to another officer close by. David handed Apps his drink and then said casually, 'I suppose you know all the doctors on the island?'

Apps said 'Cheers', swallowed half his drink and added, 'I'd know them all by name, I suppose. And most of them I must have met at one time or another. Why do you ask?'

David said, 'Well, I rather wanted to know of a good surgeon here. You see, I twisted a knee in the black-out some years ago and now and then it gives me hell. Someone told me there's a new Continental technique for removing the cartilage or something. I thought you might just know of a surgeon here who had been trained on the Continent.'

'Someone who trained on the Continent? Let me think.' He downed the rest of his drink, then screwed up his face in a gesture of ferocious concentration. 'There's an Italian here in Nicosia but I'm pretty sure he's just a G.P. Smooth type, too. The girls all love to whisper their confidences into his handsome ear. But I doubt if he can do more than cut the end off a cigar. Who else is there? Several Greek doctors but none of them would have post-war training in surgery—at least on the Continent. Wait—there is a chap who might suit you. Down at Limassol. What's his name, now? Van-something or other. Van—van, ah yes, I've got it. Vandenk. He's a

Dutchman, tallish, fair-haired character. They say he's a damn' good surgeon. Does quite a bit of operating at the Limassol hospital.'

'Has he been here long?' David asked.

'No, not very. A year perhaps. Certainly not much longer.'

'He sounds the man for me.'

'They say he's a first-class surgeon. You may 'now that the Germans invented a lot of new operating techniques during the war, bone-grafts and so on. The bastards even practised on concentration-campers. To hear these Continentals talk, you'd reckon they spent the whole war being heroic in the Underground but I wouldn't mind betting smart boys like Vandenk kept their hands in with a little quiet collaboration. Don't quote me, of course.' He grinned, then glanced at the clock on the wall behind the bar. 'My God, look at the time! I've got a date with a Hungarian charmer at the Empire. Should have been there ten minutes ago.' He gulped down the rest of his drink. 'Remind me to buy you the other half next time,' he said and went off.

David finished his own drink and decided to leave as well. It had not been an unprofitable evening. This Vandenk character would bear investigating. Just then Collings noticed he was alone and leaned over.

'You're not going, are you?' he asked. 'Why don't you join us? We've got a table over there somewhere.'

'It's nice of you,' said David, 'but I don't want to butt into your party. I'd better be going.'

Collings caught him by the arm. 'Nonsense,' he said, 'you're not butting in. The night's young. Come along,' and before David could frame an excuse, Collings steered him to a table close to the dance floor. 'Come and meet the boys,' he said.

David hesitated. 'You're sure I'm not butting in?'

'Not a bit of it, is he?' Collings appealed to the other officers sitting around the table. David saw that they were all junior to the major. They made suitably non-committal noises and smiled vaguely at the newcomer. 'Here,' said Collings, 'pull up a chair. Better not take those two. One of our chaps is treading the light fantastic out there with his girl-friend. We're just keeping an eye on him.'

David drew up a chair and was introduced to the two other officers, neither of whose names he caught. One was a young, red-faced subaltern, barely out of his teens. The other was a captain who looked like an ex-regular N.C.O. who had been commissioned. He had a small purple butterfly tattooed above his right wrist.

The dance ended and then began again in response to the clapping of the dancers. Collings had swung the conversation around to wartime Italy. He was getting on to dangerous ground. 'Remember the Gothic Line?' he asked.

'No, I never got that far,' David said as firmly as he could. As he raised his drink, he felt that Collings was watching him.

Just then the dance ended with a final flourish on the drums. People began to brush past the ringside table and out of the crush came an officer and a tall, fair-haired girl. They were making for the table. As they came up, David and the others rose. Collings introduced him. The officer, whose name was Fanshaw or Henshaw—he hadn't quite caught it—was a thin, sandy-haired young man with an arrogant tuft of ginger moustache brushed up from his lip. His face was burnt brick-red by the sun and he had a sharp, foxy look. He gave David an abrupt nod. The girl whose Christian name was Gerda but whose surname he missed entirely smiled politely but without any warmth at him. Her sleek fair hair hung down to her

shoulders. They were a golden brown, as were her arms and the upper part of her body that was exposed by the low-cut dress. She looked superbly healthy but there seemed to be no vitality in her to turn the statue into reality.

As they all sat down, David found himself next to the girl, with Henshaw, as his name turned out to be, on the far side of her. Another round of drinks arrived and David saw that Henshaw downed his in two deep swallows. The girl was merely toying with her glass and Henshaw leaned over without asking her leave, held her wrist and tipped the greater part of the contents of her glass into his own, which he at once raised and emptied. The girl appeared to blush a little under her tan but she said nothing. There was an awkward silence. Arrogant bastard, thought David; he felt that the others were thinking the same.

The music struck up once more. Henshaw was on his feet and looking peremptorily at the girl. She hesitated and then rose, perhaps a little wearily. They disappeared into the throng but as they swung into view at a corner, David could see that Henshaw was holding her unnecessarily close and seemed to be drooling down her neck in a cheek-to-cheek, over-intimate style of dancing. He could not see the girl's face but he could tell from the stiffness of her shoulders that she was not enjoying it.

'It's a warm night for that kind of caper,' he remarked.

Collings followed the direction of his glance and went red. 'Henshaw's all right,' he said defensively. 'He rather fancies himself as a dancer and he doesn't always know when he's had enough to drink. But he'll grow up.'

David grunted non-committally and Collings went on. 'Are you a dancing man?' he asked.

'Not really. I used to shake a shoe at one time but I never took it seriously.'

'Would you ask Gerda Norstel to dance? She's a nice kid and I think she's had about enough of Henshaw for one night.'

'Is that in order? I mean, I don't like cutting in on some one else's girl. And our young friend doesn't look as though he's in the mood to welcome opposition.'

'Oh, don't worry about Henshaw. I can handle him. Anyway, we'll have to break up the party fairly soon. It's getting on for eleven and we'll have to be back in camp this side of twenty-three fifty-nine hours.'

'Well, I'm not sure,' David began and then his voice trailed away. To hell with Henshaw. It was a long time since he had danced with a good-looking girl, even if she did seem a bit lifeless. You couldn't blame her with that conceited puppy pawing her around in public. Anyway, it was Collings's suggestion, not his. Collings was senior to Henshaw, probably his battery commander. It was a poor do if he couldn't cope with his subordinates.

The dance ended and the couple came back to the table. Fresh drinks had been brought and Henshaw drank his at once, then repeated the performance of taking the best part of his partner's drink. He was sweating and his little eyes looked bloodshot. The girl had a tiny silver cigarette case on the table. Henshaw reached out for it, took out a cigarette without asking her permission and lit it after several attempts. His fingers were fumbling. He blinked several times as he waved a lighted match in front of the cigarette's tip. He was obviously getting rather drunk.

That last piece of rudeness decided David. As soon as the band struck up again, he was on his feet, looking down at the girl. 'Would you care to dance with me?' he asked.

She looked blank for a second or two and then she stood up. 'Thank you,' she said. They were the first

words David had heard her utter. He could not place the accent but he knew it was not an English one. As they took the two or three paces that brought them on to the dance floor, David saw out of the corner of his eye that Henshaw was stumbling to his feet, muttering something. Collings put out a restraining arm and the young red-haired officer tried to shake it off. Collings said a few peremptory words and Henshaw slumped back into his chair.

David took the girl in his arms. Fortunately it was a waltz, one of the few dances he could perform more or less adequately. As he swung her around the first corner, he could feel the strength and suppleness of her. She was only two or three inches shorter than himself but she moved lightly and smoothly, with none of the gawkiness of the tall woman. She kept to the rhythm of the waltz but there was no lilt or apparent enjoyment in her dancing. It was correct but cold and mechanical. She might have been a dancing doll, wound up for the occasion. They danced in silence. Once David had concentrated on keeping in step and not trampling all over her feet in his rustiness, he could think of nothing to say to her. She did not seem to be the kind of girl to indulge in small talk and banalities. He felt a spasm of irritation. The last thing he wanted was to be mixed up in an incident and cutting in on another man's partner, when that man was in an ugly, drunken mood, had all the makings of a first-class row. And it wasn't even as if he was getting any satisfaction out of the dance. He might as well have a waxworks dummy in his arms. To hell with it, he thought. He hoped that Collings would be able to restrain Henshaw when the dance was over.

Just then he saw Henshaw get up from the table and walk over towards the bar, swaying slightly and then stumbling. He disappeared into the men's cloakroom.

The girl noticed his going and then she spoke for the first time.

'Are you in the British Army?' she asked.

'No,' he said, 'I was once but I'm a civilian now.'

'Have you a motor-car?'

Hell, he thought, she'll ask me what my income is next. A loud, he said, 'Yes. Why?'

She said nothing for a moment and then answered. 'I live in Kyrenia. Ian—Captain Henshaw—brought me over for this evening in a taxi and has arranged to take me back. Would you drive me back instead?'

David blinked. The coolness of it, he thought. Asking a complete stranger to get his car out and drive thirty-five miles there and back, leaving the proper escort in the lurch. He could see her point, though. A long ride in the back of a taxi with a drunken man in his present mauling and pawing mood was not the happiest way of rounding off the evening for a girl.

'What about Henshaw?' he asked. 'He's not going to like me cutting in.'

'Captain Henshaw doesn't own me,' she said coldly. 'I would rather walk back to Kyrenia in these sandals than go back with him.'

By this time they were dancing towards the ringside table where Collings and the other officers were sitting. Henshaw was still absent. David manoeuvred her alongside the table and said, 'I'm sorry, I didn't catch your surname.'

'Norstel,' she answered. 'Gerda Norstel.'

He spoke to Collings. 'Miss Norstel suggests I take her home in my car,' he said. The girl could not see his face, so he raised his eyebrows in a resigned way and half-shrugged.

'Good show,' said Collings. 'Ian Henshaw wouldn't be up to a moonlight drive in his present state.'

'I think we'll get moving now,' David went on, 'while the coast's clear. Is that okay with you?'

'Sure,' Collings replied. 'I'll try to hold the wild man back while you make your getaway. Be good.' He grinned. It was obviously a great joke to him.

'Thank you,' the girl said to David as they moved towards the exit, past the bar. She had collected her wrap and handbag from the table while David was talking to Collings. 'This is the simplest way, I think.'

'Don't speak too soon,' he answered. 'We're not clear yet.'

They walked past the cloakrooms and down the flight of steps that led to the driveway of the honky-tonk. Light streaming from the entrance threw the blackness of the surrounding garden into greater relief. As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, David could see the shadowy shapes of a few cars and taxis parked just off the path. A cigarette glowed, redly lighting up a hand and moustached lips in the front seat of one taxi. A saxophone moaned on the dance floor behind them but all was silence out here except for the unending clicking of the cicadas.

Just then there was an angry shout from the steps of the honky-tonk. A figure came bounding down the steps. It was Henshaw. David pulled the girl between two taxis. 'Stay here,' he said. He swung around and walked towards Henshaw, gradually circling so that the light from the entrance was behind his back and shining into Henshaw's face. He was beginning to enjoy himself in a cold, controlled way.

'Were you shouting at me?' he asked.

'Yes, you bastard. What the hell are you doing walking off with my girl?'

'That's a matter of opinion. Whether she's your girl or not, I mean.'

'You bastard,' shouted Henshaw. David, watching his

eyes, saw them blink in the light and then dilate. He tensed himself.

Henshaw came in with a whirling rush. He swung a right at David's face. David let it slide over his shoulder and then he hit Henshaw in the stomach. His knuckles grazed on a tunic button and bored into the slack flesh and muscle. Henshaw jack-knifed forwards, grunting as the breath jerked out of him. His guard dropped as he slumped down. David chopped the edge of his right hand against the defenceless neck. Henshaw moaned and sagged to his knees. He would have fallen flat, had not David caught him as he fell and swung him by his own momentum on to the steps of the night club. The whole incident had not lasted four seconds. Henshaw was huddled against the lower step, like a sack of old clothes.

'Nice work,' said a cool voice from the top of the steps. 'I didn't know they taught unarmed combat in the Pay Corps.' David looked up and saw Collings leaning against a pillar. He must have seen it all.

David sucked at the blood that was oozing from his knuckles, where they had been grazed by the tunic button. 'He's all yours,' he said. 'I didn't want to hit him but there was no choice. He'll be all right in a minute or two. He'll probably be as sick as a dog and he'll wake up with a stiff neck but there'll be no permanent damage—worse luck.'

'Serve him right,' said Collings. 'Next time he'll pick an infant like himself to have a work-out on. That right-hander was very neat,' he added. 'Very smooth. It's a trick they teach in the Commandos, I believe. Of course, you wouldn't know anything about that. Still, it must have come in useful in the old Pay Corps days, when a chap tried to lean over the pay-desk and grab a few extra notes.'

'Nuts,' said David. He took out a handkerchief and

wrapped it around the knuckles of his injured hand. It was beginning to smart. He walked back to the girl who stood coolly where he had left her. 'Come on,' he said 'there'll be no more trouble tonight.'

'Have you hurt him badly?' she asked. There was no concern in her voice. She might have been asking if tomorrow was Friday.

'No,' he said, 'he'll be all right, more's the pity.' They walked in silence down the short drive and the few hundred yards to David's bungalow. He backed the station waggon out of its garage and opened the door for the girl to get in. Still in silence they drove around the walled city that slept in darkness, out on to the Kyrenia road.

David was gloomily preoccupied with his thoughts as he drove. It had been an unlucky evening. The word would get round Nicosia that he was a fighting type and that was the last thing he wanted. Collings was already suspicious of him, with his bantering hints about the Commandos and the Pay Corps. The knuckles of his injured hand hurt like hell and, to cap it all, the girl had not even the grace to say 'Thank you' for getting her out of a spot. In his irritation he pushed hard on the accelerator and the big car went rocketing up the undulating, empty road. The sooner the night was over, the better.

Perhaps it was the added speed that made the girl break the silence. Even then she only spoke three words, distinctly and contemptuously. 'The British Army,' she said.

David's anger boiled over. 'For God's sake,' he said. 'Don't judge them all by one specimen. I don't know where you came from—'

'Sweden,' she interjected.

'Well, Sweden of all places. You lot of neutrals grew fat while we were fighting. Christ knows how someone

who played both sides off against the middle in the war can criticize the British Army.'

For the first time there was feeling in her voice. 'Please don't criticize my people,' she said. 'And don't hold me personally responsible for what we did or didn't do in the war. I was only fifteen when the war started.'

'Well, don't criticize the Army because of one bad egg. Here you are, enjoying the hospitality of a British Colony; getting a complete stranger to pull you out of a nasty spot and drive all round the country in the middle of the night, and all you can do is sneer at the Army. These chaps don't want to be soldiering in Cyprus or anywhere else. They'd like to be back home with their families.'

'I am sorry,' she said. The quiet apology did something to mollify him but he was still feeling disgruntled as they drove down the steep hill into Kyrenia. 'Where to?' he asked.

'The Dome Hotel, please.'

He stopped the car at the foot of the hotel steps, then climbed out and held the door open for her. He was going to show her that some Englishmen knew how to behave. She got out and stood for a moment, hesitating. Then she just said 'Thank you' in a low voice, hesitated again as if to say something more, and then walked slowly up the hotel steps.

'Don't mention it,' said David. He slammed the car door shut behind him and drove away with a roar of the engine. If he never saw the girl again, it would be soon enough.

(iv)

He woke late next morning. Sitting gloomily over the breakfast table, he decided to go into the office and send off a private report to Sterner, describing Vandenk and what he knew of his background and asking for further

inquiries to be made. He wanted to get things moving and finish the job before he got embroiled in too many complications. Last night had been unfortunate. He had made a gratuitous enemy in Henshaw and given himself away as a man who knew how to fight, all for the sake of a stuck-up girl who by now had probably forgotten the whole incident.

He walked to the office through the hot, swarming streets of Nicosia. He hoped that Hassan would not have arrived yet so that he could write his report and send it off without the knowledge of the gross Turk. It would serve him damn' well right if a stranger came in and scooped the facts from under his fat nose. But as David ducked through the bead curtain on the outer door, Miss Christides, Hassan's secretary who had ushered him into the presence those few short weeks ago, greeted him.

'Mr. Hassan would like to see you, Mr. Flint,' she said.

Damn it, he thought. Aloud he said, 'Thank you. I'll go straight in now.' He walked along the passage-way, knocked on Hassan's door and went in.

Hassan was still reclining on the divan, in the very same attitude as when David had first seen him. He might never have moved an inch in all these weeks. Perhaps he hadn't indeed, thought David. 'You wanted to see me, Mr. Hassan?' he asked.

'Ah, good morning, Mr. Flint. *Salaam alai'kum*, Allah be with you wherever you go.' He beamed and sketched a bow without moving from the divan. 'Please grace my humble room by sitting down, Mr. Flint. You must be tired from all your recent exertions.' He giggled. Then he added, 'Can I tempt you to a chocolate?' He waved a fat hand at the open box on the side table. When David impatiently shook his head, Hassan rummaged in the box, brought up a gaudy square which he studied critically and then began to unwrap, picking at it delicately with his

huge fingers. He popped the chocolate into his mouth, sighed in satisfaction and began to chew it slowly and rhythmically. He was obviously in one of his moods, David thought, playing the buffoon in an effort to annoy his visitor. But this time David was not going to be caught.

'How is your hand today, Mr. Flint?' The right hand, I mean.'

Involuntarily David glanced down at the knuckles of his right hand. A scab had begun to form over the graze. 'What do you mean?' he asked.

'I was right then. That is the hand that got hurt last night. I hear you knocked into something with it.'

'Yes, I did. How did you know?'

'You will soon learn that Cyprus is like a sounding-board. Something unusual happens in Paphos, say, and within a few hours it is known in Famagusta, a hundred and more miles away. Especially when an Englishman is involved. When I was in London many years ago there was a saying that "Man bites dog is news". Here we are the dogs and the English are the men. Anywhere one of them goes and anything he does is automatically news. Everyone, for instance, knows that you took a pretty girl away from a British officer last night and knocked him out when he tried to remonstrate with you.'

'That's one way of putting it—but it's not true. The chap was as drunk as a coot and was annoying the girl. You don't think I wanted to draw attention to myself, do you?'

'I should hope not, Mr. Flint. Our mission is a delicate one and it would be unwise to jeopardize it by becoming known as a night-club brawler.'

In spite of his resolution, David was getting angry. The impertinence of referring to it as 'our mission' irritated him. It was all very well for this fat old eunuch to

give himself airs. His job was to lead from the rear, sitting like an overstuffed cushion on his sofa while someone else did the dirty work. But what made him all the more angry was the secret realization that Hassan was right.

'Let's skip it,' he said. 'It was an unfortunate accident and it won't happen again. Is that all you wanted to see me about?'

'No, Mr. Flint.' Hassan reached down with a grunt for another chocolate. 'I was wondering whether you had anything else to report.'

'I thought my progress didn't start until you had located Knelle.'

'In the strict sense you are right. But you have told me that you are anxious to get on with your aspect of our task. What is the refrain of that song your Eton school-boys sing:—"Pull, pull together"—is it not? I suggest that we follow their example.'

'Yes,' David said, 'I do the pulling and you do the sitting. You're no light-weight cox, Mr. Hassan, to have in the boat.'

Hassan flashed a golden grin at him. '*Touché*,' he said. 'But before I tell you our progress—such as it is—have you anything to tell me?'

For a moment David was tempted to keep quiet about Vandenk. Then he saw the childishness of the wish to score over his own side. 'I haven't really been looking for Knelle, as you know,' he said. 'My job's been to get to know the island and to get myself fit. But I have got one lead, for what it's worth.' He went on to relate what Apps had told him about Vandenk.

Hassan nodded. 'That is interesting. I had already put him on the list of suspects. In fact, I cabled Mr. Sterner a few days ago to ask for more information about this Dutch doctor. What you say does not of course confirm

my suspicions but it shows that we are thinking along the same lines.'

'They could be the wrong lines.'

Of course. In this kind of work, more often than not clues fall to pieces in one's hands.'

'Have you any other clues?'

Hasan paused to select another chocolate. 'Yes, a few fragile ones. When our process of elimination is more complete they may all disappear. Apart from Vandenk, there is a foreigner here in Nicosia who describes himself as a Belgian. He has an agency for a large firm of Lebanese contractors and spends much of his time travelling between here and the mainland, supposedly on business. Then there is a retired British Army officer who lives in Famagusta. We're looking into his background.'

'A retired Army officer? That's a bit far-fetched, isn't it?'

'Who knows, Mr. Flint? We are dealing with a clever man. If he has the brains and courage to penetrate a British colony, he may have the logic to go the whole way and pass himself off as an Englishman. Knelle speaks good English, as you know from the reports.'

'Nevertheless, it's pretty improbable.'

'In this business, I find it hard to separate the probable from the impossible. All our suspects are tallish and they have fair hair. Many people share the same characteristics. Indeed, the only inhabitants of the island I do not suspect are you, Petrides—and myself. Yes, and perhaps we can add in His Excellency the Governor—'

His voice trailed away as the telephone rang. He said, 'Excuse me, please.' He picked up the instrument which stood on another small table near the divan. He listened for a second or two and then looked up at David.

'Someone wishes to speak with you,' he said.

'To me? Who on earth could that be? Who is it, do you know?'

Hassan grinned. He kept a broad, dusky hand over the mouthpiece. 'Why not answer and find out?' he said, holding out the handset.

David took it with a nod and said, 'Flint here.'

A woman's voice answered. 'Mr. Flint?'

'Yes, speaking.'

'Oh, Mr. Flint, this is Gerda Norstel. You remember, the one who was so rude to you last night. I have rung up to tell you how sorry I am for the way I behaved.'

David felt suddenly very happy although he could not think why. He blurted out, 'That's all right. I behaved pretty badly myself. It was enough to put anyone on edge.' He saw that Hassan was elaborately occupying himself with gazing into the almost empty chocolate box but no doubt he was listening as hard as he could. David hunched over the telephone and spoke more softly. 'Tell me, how did you know where to ring me?'

She laughed. 'You're becoming quite famous on the island. Everyone is talking of the man who saves damsels in distress. Actually, I traced you through your car. There is only one—what do you call it?—station waggon as big as that in Cyprus.'

David made a mental note to drive a less conspicuous car in future.

She went on speaking. It might have been a trick of the telephone but her voice seemed livelier and younger. 'Mr. Flint, I told my uncle all about last night. He was horrified at my behaviour. He says that the least I can do to make up for it is to apologize and ask if you would care to dine with us tonight.'

'Tonight? Yes, I would like to. As a matter of fact, I was thinking of driving over to Kyrenia for a swim this afternoon.'

'I love swimming,' she said. 'Do you think we could perhaps join you on the beach and bring a—how do you

call it?—picnic tea.' She pronounced the word 'peek-neek' with a slight, and to David's ears fascinating, pause between the two syllables. 'Then after ; swim and some tea we could go back to the hotel for dinner.'

'That sounds fine,' said David. 'Whereabouts do you usually go?'

'When I'm feeling lazy, I swim in the Club pool just near the castle. But I think Snake Island is nicest. Do you know it?'

'I expect so, though I don't know the name. Is it that bay a bit west of Kyrenia with a small island just off-shore?'

'Yes, that is correct. It is about a kilometre—half a mile or rather more—away from Kyrenia in the direction of Lapithos.'

'I know it. What time shall we meet?'

'Shall we say four o'clock?'

'That suits me,' said David. 'I'll look forward to it. But tell me, shall I have to fight my way to you?'

'Fight?' She sounded puzzled. 'Oh, you mean like last night.' For the first time David heard her laugh, a soft trill that surprised him. 'No,' she went on, 'I can promise there will be no difficulties of that kind. My uncle is a most sober and non-belligerent man. We will meet then at four o'clock.'

'Yes,' said David. 'Be seeing you.'

He rang off and then looked up to see the expression on Hassan's face. Hassan appeared elaborately non-committal, gazing into space with his hands clasped across his swelling stomach.

'I suppose you heard that conversation,' David said. It was more of a statement than a question.

'I heard,' Hassan nodded. 'At least, I heard your part of it. I could not help hearing. Should I have left the room? Was it private and confidential?' he asked softly.

'Not a bit. That was the girl I took home last night. She has invited me to dinner at Kyrenia tonight. To meet her uncle.'

'So I gather? Tell me, Mr. Flint, do you usually accept invitations from strangers?'

'Strangers? You could hardly call her a stranger.' Hassan had an odd knack of putting him on the defensive, he realized. But he tried to explain himself further. 'I took a helping her out of an awkward spot last night. At the time she didn't seem to appreciate it. Now she's had a chance to talk it over with her uncle. Isn't it natural she should want to make amends, shall we say?'

'Perfectly natural. I am not blaming her. But I still do not see why you should have to do anything about it. She has made the gesture. You could have thanked her, found some excuse for not accepting the invitation and that would be that.'

'Well, for heaven's sake. Aren't I to be trusted out alone? I'm a big boy now, you know.'

'That's just it, Mr. Flint. You are a big boy.' He managed to convey a sneer in the simple repetition of the words. 'Let me put it this way, Mr. Flint. You have come here to do a job. It is a job that may require all your time and your concentration if you are not to make a mistake that might have serious complications—for all of us. You should be free to come and go and, when you have done the job, to disappear quietly, if necessary. There must be no entanglements, no sex complications to put you off your stroke, as I think you English say. Look at me. I am the only free man—I have no sexual interests and ties to pull me back.'

'Why the hell don't you do the job yourself then?'

'I wish I could. Please do not think, Mr. Flint, that because I am a fat, old man who spends his life on a sofa, I have no experience of killing men. I have killed in the

past and will kill again, if I have to.' He looked straight at David and his face was set hard for once. He picked up a whisk that lay on the sofa and with one flick of his wrist squashed a fly that had settled a foot or so away. Once again David marvelled at the speed with which he could move his bulky body. 'I would kill one of Mr. Sterner's enemies just as casually as I killed that fly, Mr. Flint. I am an Oriental. Life is not so very precious to us. But Mr. Sterner has chosen you to carry out his wishes. I accept his orders and will do all I can to help you carry them out.' Suddenly he smiled and relaxed his tension. 'Remember what one of your English poets said—it was Kipling. "He travels the fastest who travels alone." Wise words, Mr. Flint.'

'You seem to be well up in English poetry,' David remarked. 'Tell me, who said "It's love that makes the world go round"?''

'It was Gilbert, Mr. Flint. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan. But he was not necessarily right. It could be hate or a desire for profits that makes the world revolve. Hate can be more satisfying than love, more lasting. You must learn to hate, Mr. Flint.'

'Don't worry about me, Mr. Hassan. I think I'm old enough now not to fall for the first woman who smiles in my direction. Not that she's done any smiling yet,' he added.

'Older men than you have found that a woman saps their concentration. I would advise you to keep well away from all friendships, male or female, while you are here. Acquaintances, yes, but no friends. You must have to leave quickly, Mr. Flint, and you will travel faster on your own. Please remember that.'

'I will, don't worry. I shan't make a fool of myself, if I can help it.'

'Sometimes fully is beyond one's jurisdiction.'

As David drove over to Kyrenia that afternoon, his mood was very different from the one that had kept him silent over the same stretch of road a few hours before. He told himself that Hassan was an old fool to be mumbling about the need to keep clear of entanglements. He didn't intend to get himself tangled up with the first girl who smiled at him. Not that Gerda had done *exactly* smiling to date. He grinned as he recalled the reminiscences that had passed between them last night. It must have been just about here on the road, where it began to wind up between grey boulders and heather to the top of the pass, that she had made her biting reference to the British Army. That was the strangest way of starting an affair, in a slanging match. Hell, it wasn't going to be an affair. Hassan's suspicions were getting on his mind. They could be friends and enjoy some fun without the whole business developing into anything serious. He imagined these Swedish girls were pretty matter of fact, not the flirtatious type. Hassan was just an old eunuch. It might be a kind of sour grapes with him. Poor chap! It must be hell, when you came to think of it, getting your only satisfaction out of sitting on an overstuffed sofa eating chocolates. David began to hum to himself 'Nothing venture nothing win, blood's thick and water thin' as he swung the big car around the corkscrew bends on the far side of the pass and then accelerated past the clumps of olive trees that clung to the seaward slopes of the hills down to Kyrenia.

As he crawled in low gear down the steep main street, it struck him that he might have arranged to call at the Dome Hotel and give Gerda and her uncle a lift out to Snake Island. He even slowed up outside the hotel, uncertain whether to pull in to the small drive or not. Then

he decided to drive on and keep to the present arrangement. It might be just as well to meet them in a more unfrequented spot. Hassan's words about Cyprus being a sounding-board came back to his mind. The old ruffian was probably right at that. The island was too small and the British residents were probably too bored for gossip and scandal not to rear their twin ugly heads. Not that there was anything underhand in the meeting or his intentions, he told himself. But it might be just as well to keep out of the public eye as far as possible at this stage.

He drove on past the football pitch on the outskirts of the town and another hotel lying snugly off the road with its tennis court and gravelled drive, for all the world like an English country house, along a winding road framed between ditches and tall hedges like an English lane. He found the entrance to the beach opposite Snake Island and drove the station waggon off the road into the shade of a clump of carob trees. That reminded him. He must arrange with Hassan for a less conspicuous car. He wanted something pretty fast; a small car that had to be pushed hard to touch sixty was no good on these long up and downhill runs. But, whatever it was, there must be several more like it on the island. Quite soon now he might need to move inconspicuously, in the Limassol area perhaps, and he didn't want a car that shrieked 'here I come' to all the passers-by. Hassan could fix it easily enough, he supposed. Good old Hassan.

He sat in the car to strip off his shirt and trousers. He already had swimming trunks on underneath. Taking a towel, a packet of cigarettes and matches and his copy of *The Maltese Falcon*, he locked the car doors and walked a little way down the beach. The sand was warm on his bare feet. A slight breeze crept off the sea and disappeared through the break in the low hills that formed the bay of

Snake Island. It was just enough to be refreshing, a trickle of comfort in the brassy glare of sunlight that seemed to bounce off the flat sea and the steepish, sandy sides of the bay. The sea was a pale green inshore and, further out, a noble blue that finally merged in misty confusion with the horizon sky. It circled Snake Island, which rose in an irregular rocky mound some two or three hundred yards from the shore, with hardly a ripple.

He noticed that the beach was almost empty. Away in one corner an Englishwoman sat on a rug while two or three young children played nearby. Further up the beach a party of Cypriot children were running into the water, splashing each other solemnly and then running out again in an unending game. They were playing quite silently, with none of the shrieks of laughter that would have accompanied the same game on an English beach.

David lay back on his bath towel and found his place in the book. But after a few pages the machinations of Sam Spade began to pall on him. It was an effort to screw up his eyes against the glare of the sun and concentrate on a printed page. He put the book down and stretched himself on the hot sand, closing his eyes and letting the sun run over and then soak into his body. He thought idly that this was the life. The last week in May and here he was, at his ease in the sunshine. Back in England it was probably raining and people were wondering whether or not to discard their winter overcoats and thick underwear. The sun lit a red glare behind his closed eyes. His head lolled to one side and he felt his thoughts melting into drowsiness in the heat of the sun.

He must have dozed off for the next thing he knew was the sound of voices nearby. He jerked himself awake and saw a pair of brown legs standing almost over him. They seemed to blot out the sky and there was a sound of laughter high above them. He scrambled into a sitting

position and saw that the legs belonged to Gerda. A man stood a few feet away.

He sprang to his feet and rubbed a hand over his eyes. 'I'm so sorry. I must have dropped off. Do excuse me.'

She laughed again, that same trill he had heard over the telephone. 'My uncle was saying that the old fairy story was reversed. It should be Beauty who's well asleep.' In spite of her tan her cheeks turned red as she suddenly saw the implication of the words. In a slight confusion which David found charming, she said, 'But let me introduce my uncle. Mr. Flint—Doctor Andersen.'

The man with her smiled at David, then inclined his head in a stiff little bow, saying, 'Enchanted.'

David looked at him. He was fairly tall and thin with iron grey hair and grave eyes. His chin was square, bisected by a marked cleft. He was almost as sunburnt as Gerda and he wore an open-necked shirt and a pair of faded shorts. His legs were thin but sinewy and strong.

'How do you do?' said David. He added, 'Did you say "Doctor"? ' as he shook hands. The grasp he felt was firm.

'Not a real doctor, Mr. Flint. Not someone who cuts you up or gives you pills to swallow. Just a doctor of philosophy, a man who tries to find out what life was like many years ago, not what people's health is like today.' He spoke nearly perfect English, David noted, but there was almost a Lowland Scottish burr in his consonants and the flat vowels that come from Glasgow.

'My uncle is a—what is it called?—an archæologist.'

'Archæologist,' said David.

'Yes, thank you, an archæologist. He likes to dig up old ruins. He has a theory—but we mustn't talk about that now or else we will be listening to a lecture for the rest of the afternoon.' She smiled at her uncle in the affectionate and proud way a mother smiles at a precocious child. 'Shall we have our swim now?'

'Good idea,' David said. 'It might help to wake me up properly. Will you join us, sir?'

'No, thank you,' said Doctor Andersen. 'I will sit and read, if you do not mind.' He had a bulky book under his arm.

'My uncle has a bad stomach complaint,' Gerda explained. 'Colic, they call it. He has never looked after himself properly and this is the result. Swimming is not good for him.'

'My niece would like to wrap me in cotton-wool, Mr. Flint. She is worse than any wife would be.'

'I promised my mother to look after you,' Gerda said. 'He is my mother's brother,' she explained to David. 'That is why, of course, our surnames are different.'

'Enough, Gerda,' said her uncle. 'Mr. Flint wants a swim and not a discourse on our family history. We Continentals,' he went on, 'like to have everything cut and dried when we meet a stranger. We tend to bore him with our family details. The dynasty of the Norstels and the Andersens would leave Mr. Flint cold, as I think the expression is. Away with you and allow me to get on with my study of the Etruscan Period.'

He smiled diffidently at David, then sat down and opened his book. Gerda, who wore a sleeveless shirt and a pair of shorts, stepped out of them in a matter-of-fact way and dropped them on the sand near David's towel. She was wearing a two-piece bathing costume, two brief bits of white wool that showed off the deep brown of her body. David felt a little ashamed of his tan which was a biscuity colour compared to hers. She had a magnificent body, he saw at a glance. On the dance floor last night she had been pretty in a healthy way, but, almost stripped, she looked superb, a living and perfect mechanism. She raised her arms to coil up the long fair hair which hung to her shoulders. One lock was almost white, where the sun

had bleached it. The skin was paler underneath her arms and he saw the glint of two golden tufts of hair.

'Ready?' he said. 'I'll race you down to the water.'

He set off at a brisk lope, expecting to leave her far behind, but she kept up to his shoulder with an effortless stride. Side by side they plunged into the shallows, kicking up spray that sparkled in the sunlight. She cut into the water in a flat dive and started to swim out towards the island with a smooth crawl stroke. David was a fairly strong swimmer, but he realized that, even if he went all out, he could do no more than match her speed. And so he deliberately let her go ahead, not wishing to appear too good an athlete. After fifty yards or so, she swung on to her back, shook the water from her face and waited for him. He caught her up and shouted, 'Isn't it grand?'

'Wonderful,' she said. She was not even breathing hard, he noticed. 'Shall we swim out to the island?' she asked.

'We can try. If you promise to tow me if I get tired.'

He grinned as he trod water but she took the remark seriously. 'Of course. I hold a life-saving certificate. And anyway we shall be in our depth nearly all the way. There is a deeper channel about half-way across but on each side the water is quite shallow.'

'Let's go,' he said. 'I feel quite safe now.'

She nodded her head gravely, then rolled over in the water and began to swim at half-speed. David caught up with her and, side by side, they swam out. As they went he watched her face every time she swung sideways to take a new breath. He could see the flash of her teeth when she gulped in air and the distant, preoccupied look in her eyes. There was no expression on her face, she never smiled when she caught David's eye. She was concentrating on the movements of her body and might have been undergoing some solemn ritual.

They swam into the shallows by the edge of the island, then hauled themselves up on to a rock that lay like a flat table over the water. The sun was hot on their backs as they dipped their toes into the tepid sea.

'I hope the island doesn't live up to its name,' David remarked.

'Oh, you mean the snakes. I have never seen one here. My uncle says that the name comes from an old legend. St. Paul came to Cyprus which was then overrun by snakes. He ordered them off but as they couldn't swim well, they made for the nearest point—here. That's the story.'

'Seems fair enough. I can't swim well, but I managed to get here. You're a good swimmer,' he went on.

'Yes,' she said, as though acknowledging the obvious. There was none of the giggling or mock-modesty about her, he realized, that most English girls of her age would have shown. This directness was rather refreshing.

'Why did you come here?' he asked.

'To Cyprus? It is a long story. During the war we had to stay in Sweden all the time, of course. I have not had a real holiday abroad since I was a little girl. My uncle has always wanted to come to Cyprus because it is such a fascinating place to him professionally. He says that there are traces of every civilization for the past five thousand years here, all in the one place. That makes it very convenient for an archæologist.'

'Archæologist,' he said.

'Yes, of course, archæologist. I am always forgetting that word. My English is not good. I have two older sisters and a brother who have all left home and are married. When my uncle came back after the war, he found me alone with my mother—my father died many years ago—and he felt sorry for me. So he arranged to bring me to Cyprus with him.'

'Are you staying long?'

'It depends on Uncle Johan's work. This is really a hobby with him but he takes it very seriously, as you are sure to discover. We have been here several months and his work is not half over, I think. We may have to spend the rest of the year here.'

'And what do you do with yourself a day?'

'I help my uncle by typing out his notes or cataloguing the things he finds. And then I swim a lot and sunbathe. Sometimes I go to dances in Nicosia, as you know.'

'I know.' He smiled but saw that she was quite serious. 'Tell me, if it's not a rude question, how did you ever meet a poisonous type like your chum last night?' Even as he spoke the words, the realization came to him with a slight shock that he had known her less than twenty-four hours.

'My chum? Oh, you mean Captain Henshaw. "Chum"—that is what little boys and girls call their friends, yes?'

'Yes. But it's also a slang word for a grown-up friend.'

'I do not think Ian and I will be friends any more,' she said gravely. 'I did not know he could behave like that. It was horrible and very—very—'

'Embarrassing,' he suggested.

'Thank you, embarrassing. When his regiment came here some weeks ago, I was invited to a cocktail party—what you call a house-warming party, I think. I met him then. He behaved very correctly, as one would expect a British officer to behave. He met Uncle Johan, who did not like him very much. My uncle,' she interpolated, 'is a wise man. He may spend his time looking for fossils but he does not live altogether in the past. He did not like Captain Henshaw and said so. That, of course, had the opposite effect on me and made me like him all the more. Girls of my age do not want advice,' she added and she smiled. She seemed very young and defenceless when she

smiled. 'I went on seeing him, going to dances and swimming parties with him up to last night. I found him gay and amusing, although he drank a lot. But he always—what do you say?—carried it well. Until last night. Now I do not want to see him ever again.'

David felt an odd sensation. He recognized it as a twinge of jealousy. He could just imagine that foxy-faced bastard snarling round a decent girl, leering into her face, fondling her in a taxi on the way back to Kyrenia when he was a bit fuddled with brandy. David wondered if Henshaw had ever made love to her. She didn't look that kind but you could never tell with women. The ones who looked you straight in the eye and had no time for petty flirting were often the worst when it came to a showdown. Hell, he thought, I'd better cool off. This is not the time to get worked up about a girl I'd never heard of yesterday.

'Shall we swim back?' he suggested. 'I've got my breath back now, I think.'

They dropped off the rock into the sea and swam slowly back, again side by side. The dried salt tingled on David's body with the impact of the water. Once or twice on the way back they paused and floated, with eyes shut against the glare of the sun. At last they came to the shallows by the beach. David sat back in a few inches of water for a while, feeling the sucking and drifting of the sand across his legs as it was tugged to and fro by the patient, almost tideless sea. Then he stood up and together they walked up the beach to where her uncle was still reading. David dropped down on to the sand but Gerda stayed on her feet a few yards away. She loosened her hair which hung in damp curls around her shoulders. Then, unself-consciously, she began to do physical exercises, swinging her arms and touching her toes. He watched her body—the long, straight legs, the muscles

shifting smoothly under the skin that was glistening with the salt, in silent admiration. There was no coquetry about her display, he thought, no hidden sexual enticement. She was like a thoroughbred exercising in a paddock, unaware that spectators were marvelling at her swiftness and strength.

Her uncle slipped a sheet of paper on which he had been taking notes into the book to mark his place. He shut the book and then asked, 'Did you enjoy your swim?'

'It was lovely, sir,' David said.

'That is good, Gerda, do come and sit down. You are not in training for a boxing match. I find something incongruous in a half-naked girl waving her arms and legs about in public.'

She smiled fondly at him. 'Yes, Uncle,' she said. She did a few more half-defiant movements, then pirouetted and lightly dropped on to the towel on the other side of David. She rummaged in her bag and brought out a pair of dark glasses. She lay back with legs slightly spread and arms to her sides, as though offering herself to the fierce sun. David could see the fine hairs on her legs and arms glinting in the sun. He could not tell whether her eyes were open or not under the dark glasses. He looked away in case she might see him gazing at her body.

He brought out his cigarettes. The uncle declined but Gerda took one. David leant across to light it for her, brushing against her breast with the outside of his arm. Her flesh was warm and firm yet it yielded to the slight pressure. His mouth felt dry as he sucked at the cigarette and shifted a few inches away from the girl. Steady the Buffs, he thought.

For half an hour or more they stayed on the beach, smoking and idly chatting. Doctor Andersen seemed pre-occupied. He added little to the desultory conversation. David wondered whether he were working on this

famous theory of his. Perhaps politeness demanded that the conversation should be worked round to include it but David felt too lazy, too surfeited with sun and sea, to concentrate on a serious theme. After a while Gerda got up and produced a vacuum flask of tea and some plastic cups from a wicker basket. They lolled on the beach for another hour until the shadows from the high ground nearby began to stripe it. Doctor Andersen, who did not seem to be strong in spite of his sunburn, shivered once or twice, then suggested that they might go back to the hotel.

‘Perhaps you would care for a fresh-water shower,’ he said to David, ‘to wash the salt off. And my niece can brush the tangles out of her hair. I refuse to sit down to dinner with a girl who looks like a cave-dweller’s mate.’

Gerda smiled at him and leant over to pat his arm. ‘You are right, Uncle Johan,’ she said. ‘As always. I will try to improve on nature and be a credit to you.’

It was pleasant, David thought, to see an uncle and a niece so affectionate towards each other, in spite of their occasional bantering. And yet somehow it gave him a lonely feeling, as though he were excluded from the relationship. He wondered idly what he might have missed in life through having no near relations, no one with whom he could be his natural self.

He and Gerda pulled their clothes on over their dry swimming costumes. They climbed into the station waggon and he was privately glad to see that Gerda sat on the seat beside him, as though it were the obvious place to sit, while her uncle got into one of the back seats. The drive back to the hotel took only a few minutes. He parked and locked the car and then they walked together into the hotel, up a flight of stairs and along a corridor. Doctor Andersen had a room at the end of the corridor and Gerda’s room was opposite.

'If you would care to come in here,' Doctor Andersen said, 'and use my bathroom, Gerda can disappear and put on her—is warpaint the right phrase? There is a balcony outside my room. It overlooks the sea and is quite pleasant. We can have a drink out there and Gerda will join us in a few hours' time'—he smiled—'when she has made herself look more respectable.'

'You wait, Uncle,' she said. 'I will make myself look like a bad woman and flirt madly with all the fat Greeks in the dining-room later. That will serve you right.'

'Away, child,' he said. 'You are not yet too old to be spanked with a slipper.' They both laughed at each other, then Gerda disappeared into her room. Once again David felt shut out.

He followed Doctor Andersen into the hotel bedroom and was shown the narrow bathroom next door. 'Will you go ahead and have a bath or a shower?' the doctor suggested. 'I can use the hand-basin in here and change my clothes while you are bathing. Then you can dress in here. There is no hurry. I hardly exaggerated when I said that Gerda would join us in a few hours' time. As a bachelor I have never understood why the time taken for a woman's toilet is in inverse ratio to the number of clothes they have to put on.'

'Thank you, sir,' David said. He shut the bathroom door, stripped off his shirt and trousers and the dry, sandy swimming trunks and stepped under the shower. Doctor Andersen seemed a pleasant sort of man, a bit diffident perhaps, but with a sense of humour. There appeared to be something genuine about him, especially in his fondness for his niece. As for Gerda, she obviously cared for him very much. She looked shrewd enough not to go for an uncle who wasn't a decent fellow. What about Henshaw? came into his mind. He decided that was different. Henshaw was no relative. Any girl might be taken in by a uniform

and a little slickness. Besides, there had been nothing in it. Quite sure? came another question. He shrugged his shoulders under the needling rush of the water. To hell with Henshaw. The thought of him wasn't going to spoil the prospect of a pleasant evening.

It was a pleasant evening. After drying himself and dressing, David joined the uncle on the balcony overlooking the sea. They sat in basket chairs and he drank a couple of pink gins while Doctor Andersen sipped tonic water, excusing himself from stronger drink on account of his stomach complaint. The sun was setting and the sea was a shimmering blue-green. Gently it slapped and patted the wall below with a quiet, soothing rhythm.

Doctor Andersen was a friendly but not talkative companion and David found himself taking charge of the conversation. 'Excuse me, sir,' he said, 'this isn't meant to be an impertinent question but I notice you've got a sort of Scottish accent. Is that so or do all your people speak English that way? It isn't noticeable in Gerda, I don't think.'

'You have a quick ear,' the doctor commented. 'You are right, I do speak with a Scottish accent, I believe. When I was a very young man—before I learned to speak your language at all—I spent several months in Glasgow. As the language came to me from trying to talk to the people there, the accent must have come as well. First impressions are often strongest and I have never been able to lose the accent ever since. I have tried to pick up—what do you say—the accent of Oxford but without success.'

'You're not the only one,' David said with a smile. 'The Scots are a tenacious race. I know several who have lived off the fat of the land in England almost from childhood—some in fact who were born in England of Scottish parents—and they all talk like Will Fyffe.'

'Will Fyffe? I do not know of him.'

'Oh, he was a music-hall comedian. Wonderful man. He sang a famous song—"I Belong to Glasga' ". He hummed a few bars of the tune and then fell silent. Doctor Andersen said no more but sipped his tonic water and looked out over the sea. His eyes were unfocused and David decided that his thoughts were far away perhaps back in Glasgow those many years ago. Hardly a romantic memory.

The silence was a companionable one but David felt that it was up to him to keep the ball rolling. After thinking for a subject, he said, 'Gerda tells me you have a theory, sir?'

'Yes,' a voice chimed in from behind him, 'do tell us about your theory, Uncle. I have only heard it seven hundred and fifty times, so I cannot wait for another repetition.'

David stood up and looked round. Gerda was standing in the open doorway leading to the balcony. Her feet had made no noise in crossing the bedroom carpet. The light from the bedroom behind her glowed on the sleek fairness of her hair and struck a sheen in the long green dress she wore. She had a wrap flung carelessly around her shoulders and her brown arms were bare. David would hardly have recognized her from the girl with the wet hair who had been contorting herself vigorously in physical jerks on the beach a couple of hours ago. He swallowed as he stared at her.

'Are you training to be a burglar, niece?' asked Doctor Andersen. 'Creeping about on tiptoe in other people's rooms. Come and sit down. As a punishment, I *will* repeat my theory, although I apologize in advance to our friend for inflicting it on him as well. It is not a new theory,' he went on, 'there are not many things yet to be discovered in this world, but I hope to take it a step further than my predecessors.'

Gerda sat down, smoothing her dress and smiling at

David, as though they were fellow-conspirators. Her uncle began to speak, stumbling a little to begin with but more quickly and vehemently as he got into his stride. David concentrated at first on what he was saying but after a while his attention wandered to the girl. She sat there demurely, nodding her head from time to time, but once, when she caught David's eye, she seemed to signal a fractional wink at him. He could not be certain; her face had not lost its composure for a second. He caught the words '*The Golden Bough*' from the uncle's monologue and tried to switch his mind back to the subject. It appeared that Sir James Frazer—another bloody Scot, thought David—had first propounded the theory that Christianity had much in common with older, pagan beliefs. There had, in fact, been a common stock of beliefs and rituals which different religions had adapted for their own purposes.

'There is something in human nature,' the doctor went on, almost speaking to himself, 'that requires to find an explanation for the apparently inexplicable. For example, the ancient Greeks knew little or nothing about meteorology or astronomy. Why should they? So when the lightning flashed or a meteorite struck the earth, they had to find some reason to satisfy themselves. Of course. What else could it be but Zeus, the leader of the Gods, flinging his thunderbolts capriciously at the earth? And so on. In crude forms similar beliefs exist to this day. If people cannot find a natural reason, they will invent a supernatural one. Country people will see a white mist rising over marshy ground at night and they will not recognize it for what it is. They think they have seen a ghost. Perhaps some unfortunate person had been drowned previously in that same marsh. Of course, it must be the dead person's ghost come back to haunt the spot. That is only a crude example but it is typical of many more ingenious legends. Cyprus is full of them. Did you know

that Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of Love, is said to have risen from the waves just off the west coast of the island? Even to this day there is a spring near the shore that is called the Well of Aphrodite. One of the later reasons for my visit here is to go to the place and see if I can find out what gave rise to that legend.'

'And then he will write it all down in a dull old book, a thousand pages long, and I shall become famous as the assistant who helped him in his world-shaking discovery,' said Gerda. 'Perhaps Hollywood will be after me.'

'Hollywood is too busy inventing new myths to be interested in the old ones,' said her uncle. 'Besides, a film star needs to be beautiful. You would be handicapped from the start.'

She gaily shook her fist at him. 'Won't you take my part, David?' It was the first time he recalled her using his Christian name. He felt strangely pleased. He made an exaggerated study of her features and then said, 'Not bad. Not good, of course, but not bad. Now that Marie Dressler has retired, there might be room for you.'

'I asked for that,' she laughed. 'You English are all alike. Ungallant is the word.'

Doctor Andersen had obviously never heard of Marie Dressler. He smiled vaguely at them both.

For something to say, David observed, 'I thought it was only the Germans who wrote up their research in long books.'

There was a sudden silence. A cold breeze seemed to whisper off the sea. David wondered what brick he had dropped. Doctor Andersen's face was set, and then it creased into a polite smile.

'I'm sorry,' David blundered on. 'Did I say something wrong?'

'We are not very fond of the Germans,' Gerda said. 'Besides—you tell him, Uncle.'

'Long before the war, I had a friend in Germany,' her uncle said slowly. 'I met him again not very long ago. He is interested in the same ideas and I happened to tell him the theory I was working on. You know how it is, when you have a new idea you like to test it on your friends. This man said nothing at the time but later I heard that he had put out the idea as his own and had equipped an expedition on a far more lavish scale than my little effort, in the hope of finding better and more conclusive evidence. He is in Greece at this moment, I hear, and he is almost certainly ahead of me in his work. There is nothing legally wrong in it, of course,' he added. 'There is no copyright in ideas. And in the long run the sum of knowledge will benefit from research on a wider scale. But my vanity has been hurt a little. I had hoped to be the first to announce my findings. Now I shall be a poor second, I think.'

'I'm so sorry,' said David. 'Typical German behaviour, of course. I hope he falls off the Acropolis and breaks his neck.'

'Seconded and carried unanimously,' Gerda said. 'I suggest we go and dine now. If you are both as hungry as I am, you must be more than ready.'

'Gerda has an unnatural appetite,' said her uncle. 'She could eat two people's share if she really put her mind to it. Luckily, I eat far less than a normal person, or else we should certainly be charged extra for our meals.'

David joined in their laughter and then they trooped down to the dining-room. He noticed that Doctor Andersen had spoken the truth. He only picked at his dinner and sipped perhaps half a glass of the red 'Othello' wine, which was a pleasant local product. Gerda and David made up for his abstention, for the swim and the fresh air had sharpened two normally vigorous appetites. They lingered over coffee and brandy and then went back to the upper balcony. The night was warm and humid and the breeze

off the sea was refreshing. The balcony ran round the corner of the hotel and, leaning against the rail, David could see a thin moon floating above the jagged mountain range beyond Hilarion. The mountains looked like black, decaying teeth against the paler night sky.

They chatted for a long while in a peaceful series of intermittent conversations. When Gerda asked him why he was staying in Cyprus, he had his answer pat. He told them that he had been working rather hard back in London and the Chairman of his company who was very decent had appointed him a travelling inspector, so that he would have a good excuse to spend a paid holiday abroad and at the same time carry out a vaguely useful job for the business. He was helping to change over the accounting system for the Cyprus branch, which left him plenty of spare time for amusement. The answer seemed to satisfy her and the conversation was soon turned into other channels.

Some time later David noticed Doctor Andersen stifling a yawn. He glanced surreptitiously at the luminous dial of his wristwatch and saw with surprise that it was after eleven o'clock. At the next pause in their talk he shifted in his chair and said, 'It's getting rather late. I'll have to be moving, I'm afraid.'

Gerda glanced at her own minute gold wristwatch. 'It is late. And this is the second night in succession I've been up longer than usual.' Unself-consciously she stretched herself like a sleek cat.

'Speaking of last night,' said her uncle, 'I haven't thanked you yet, Mr. Flint, for bringing my niece home. And, I gather, for saving her from an awkward situation. It was very kind of you.'

'Not a bit,' said David. 'It was nothing, really. And anyway, I got my thanks at the time.' He grinned at Gerda.

She made a face at him. 'That's spoilt it,' she said. 'I hoped nobody was going to refer to my behaviour. I was upset, not myself. Besides, I did apologize to you this morning on the telephone. Unless you'd like a signed statement.'

She went on, 'You should have been there, Uncle. It was most thrilling. David just hit him—bang, bang—like that and down he went. Just like the films.'

'That's enough,' David said. 'Apart from being embarrassed, he did not want to get a reputation as a fighting man. There was nothing in it really. The fellow was so drunk it was like hitting a child. I felt rather a cad in hitting him at all but it was the only thing to do at that point.'

Doctor Andersen shifted from one foot to the other. 'Anyway, you have earned our gratitude. I hope we shall see much more of you during your stay.'

'I hope so too, sir.'

'Then, if you will excuse me, I'll get ready for bed. Gerda, you might make up for your lack of courtesy last night by seeing our guest off.'

'I'll never hear the last of that,' she said wryly. 'Come on, David, let us leave this growling uncle of mine.' She tugged his arm.

'Coming,' he said. 'Good night, sir.' They shook hands and then he followed Gerda along the corridor. When they reached the station waggon, he paused and said, 'It has been fun. I've enjoyed every moment of it.'

'I'm so glad,' she replied. 'So have I. I really am sorry for the way I treated you last night. It was quite unforgivable—but you have forgiven me, haven't you?'

'Of course. But there was nothing to forgive. I thought you behaved very well in a rotten situation.'

'No, I behaved badly. And you know it. It was rude to ask a stranger to take me home, involve him in a fight and

then not even thank him but say horrid things about his countrymen. I don't know what you must think of me.'

'If I began to tell you, you would probably blush.' She began to blush, as it was. 'To prove my point, how about doing this again? I mean, a swim and supper afterwards. But this time I insist on your being my guest, appetite or no appetite.'

'That would be very nice,' she said. 'Shall we say tomorrow? Same time at Snake Island?'

'Grand. But this time I propose we drive back to Nicosia, have dinner and then I'll bring you back in the car. If your uncle doesn't object.'

'I'm sure he won't. He's not very strong, as you have seen, and a quiet evening will be good for him.'

'Till tomorrow then,' David said. 'Good night, Gerda—and thank you for a lovely time.'

They shook hands. He climbed into the station waggon, his palm still tingling from the contact of her fingers. He started the engine, revved up for a moment or two, then waved to her as he let in the clutch. He swung the station waggon out of the drive and headed for Nicosia. Climbing up towards the pass, he began to hum. He thought how different this drive back was from its predecessor only twenty-four hours earlier. Then he had hoped they would never meet again. Now he was already looking forward to the next time. She was a damn' nice girl, he decided. Such a refreshing change from the English girls he had seen on the island, so direct and unpretentious, not simpering and flirtatious like the man-hungry Service women and unattached relatives of Government officials. He would have to be careful, he thought. It would only need a gentle push to make him fall for her in a big way. He wasn't going to let himself in, of course. The business on hand—which he had quite forgotten for the best part of a whole day—would put that out of the question. Still,

it was pleasant to think that the opportunity was there, even if he didn't intend to take advantage of it. He roared down the last foothill into the plain north of Nicosia with a smile on his face.

(vi)

Ten days went quickly by. They fell into an unpremeditated but strangely pleasant pattern. In the mornings David concentrated, as best he could, on his official business. Not that there was much to concentrate on. Hassan was still waiting for news from London on the background of Vandenk. David had decided that it would be safer not to take Petrides, the driver, wherever he went. Petrides was a good chap, he thought, but the stage might be rapidly approaching where a witness to his movements would be unhealthy. One morning David felt like doing some investigating on his own. He would dearly love to score off the complacent Turk and steal a march on him. So he drove to Limassol in the hope of picking up some facts about Vandenk. It was a wasted journey. He did not dare to call at the doctor's house, which he discovered was on the Polymedhia road half a mile out of the town. He noted with some satisfaction that it could be approached from the open fields behind but otherwise he found out nothing of any advantage.

Twice he drove to Famagusta and spent several hours at the Club there. On the second occasion he managed to scrape up an acquaintance with Colonel Sedley, the third suspect on Hassan's list. The Colonel was indeed above medium height and what hair remained on his sunburned scalp could have been classified as fair. But otherwise he seemed to have none of the attributes of a Knelle. When he laughed, he made a curious whinnying noise, baring his prominent teeth below the typical brushed-up

moustache of the Regular soldier—like a horse peering through a gap in a hedge, thought David. The Colonel had spent most of the war in Intelligence, he said, and it cost David much patience and perhaps half a dozen pink gins to find out how victory had depended on the efforts of the chairborne Colonel and his colleagues. David duly reported all the facts he picked up to Hassan but without any conviction that they might be valuable clues to the identity of Knelle.

He was beginning to feel that the hunt for Knelle was something he had imagined. He tried to recreate in his mind the intensity of Sterner's feelings but the image was constantly dissipated in the strong sunlight of Cyprus. The thought that any day he might have to track down and kill some stranger had no more impact on him than the adventures of Sam Spade which he was re-reading in *The Maltese Falcon*.

The afternoons and evenings he spent with Gerda contributed to his feeling of unreality. Sometimes they went swimming at Snake Island. At other times they would drive westwards towards Lapithos until they came to some lonely, sheltered bay. They would swim and picnic, lolling in the sun at their ease or swimming far out to sea and floating in the warm, almost tideless water. Sometimes they went further afield, driving all the way to Famagusta, perhaps, for a tour round the old churches, to be followed by the inevitable swim and then dinner at a hotel. Very occasionally Doctor Andersen came with them but usually he waved them a vague good-bye and went back to his notes and his thick books. David had come to like the doctor. He had a sad, diffident streak in his nature but he was gentle and friendly. He was obviously devoted to his niece in spite of his constant teasing and David liked him all the more for that.

As for Gerda, he could not define his feelings towards

her. She was not beautiful but people gazed at her when she entered a hotel dining-room because of her superb body, her long fair hair and deep tan, her walk that expressed health and vitality at every stride. He was proud to be her escort when other men stared at her frankly and their women guests took one quick look and then turned away with studied unconcern. But she was not just a magnificent animal without brains and character. The more he came to know her, the more he liked her personality. Perhaps best of all he liked the lack of strain in talking to and being with her. With most girls he had known, the friendship or affair had been one long-drawn-out duel of the sexes, feinting for an advantage, flirting and withdrawing, playing down passion for fear of being snubbed. It had often been fun but always a strain, dissimulating sincerity until it became insincere. There was none of this with Gerda. She took the friendship in her stride. When she was pleased with something he had said or done, she admitted it frankly. They teased each other a great deal but there was no edge of malice in their bickering. It was becoming a rare friendship, David admitted; the free and easy comradeship that one man can usually only achieve with another man, yet behind it all the tang of sex to keep the relationship vital. He knew that it could not remain on this basis indefinitely. He was honest enough with himself to realize that there can be no static friendship between a man and a woman. It would either develop or decay. He was privately afraid of both alternatives. He could not afford to get inextricably tied to this girl. On the other hand, he would hate to lose the pleasure her companionship gave him. The only course, he decided, was to play the cards as they were dealt. Something would turn up sooner or later to take the decision for him.

One evening he kissed her for the first time. They had

dined at the Dome Hotel with Doctor Andersen who retired soon after dinner with a headache. They went for a stroll before David drove back to Nicosia. It was a balmy night, warm and still with just a whisper of a breeze off the sea. They walked slowly round the little harbour of Kyrenia, watching the thread of moonlight that tacked the ripples of water on the placid sea and listening to the creaking and straining of the caïques tied up to the harbour wall. Behind them the cottages and the whitewashed church were quiet in the moonlight. Dark shadows spilled over the path where they walked. Suddenly Gerda tripped over an iron ring set into the stone and she stumbled. They were only a few feet from the edge of the harbour wall and David grabbed at her in a swift reflex action. He swung her back from the edge, gripping one arm with his left hand and encircling her with the other. They were so close he could feel her breath on his cheek as she laughed. Then, without thinking he kissed her. There was nothing half-hearted about her response, no would-be modest hesitation. Her lips were warm and soft and as eager as his own. They held the kiss for several seconds and then she gently broke away. Neither referred to the incident as they continued their stroll around the harbour but when he left her that evening she held her face up to him frankly for another good-night kiss.

Still David tried to keep his feelings in check by rationing their kisses. He would not admit to himself that they were more than good friends and he thought illogically that the relationship would not develop if manifestations of it were lacking. For a few days he managed to walk the razor's edge of indecision. Then one afternoon, when he and Gerda were sitting on the bench opposite Snake Island with Doctor Andersen, the conversation turned to the doctor's hobby. More to keep the ball rolling than out of

interest, David asked him why he had chosen archæology rather than something else.

In his flat, Glasgow accent the doctor replied, 'I have often wondered about that myself. I think the answer is that people are transient things. They come and go. They have their little loves and hates, they fight their wars and create their families but in a little while—the wink of an eye in the sight of eternity—they crumble away into dust. There is an English hymn which puts it well. "Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away. They fly forgotten as a dream——"'

"Dies at the opening day", David finished the quotation softly.

'Ah, you know it. But although human beings disappear and soon afterwards their sons and *their* sons after them, what they build and make lives on for a while. And then that too disappears. Before the war a friend of mine was on an expedition that went to excavate Babylon. Babylon, the symbol of human pride and luxury. He told me that they went across the desert south of Baghdad until they came to the place, some sandy foothills in the middle of nowhere. They began to dig away the soft sand and at last uncovered the remains of the city. The bas-reliefs sealed up by the sand were superb, he said, and the pavements of the hidden city were made of brick with a bright blue glaze. They shone in the first sunlight they must have seen for thousands of years. But what impressed him most, he told me, was the thought that Time had rubbed out this immensely proud and powerful city as a child will build a sand-castle on the beach and then smear it into nothing by one push of its hand. If I were to analyse my feelings, I think I should find that it is the morbid fascination that nothing lasts for ever that attracts me.'

'What a nice thought for a sunny afternoon,' said Gerda. 'Come on, David, we had better have another

swim quickly before Uncle's time catches up with us.'

He stood up, waved to Doctor Andersen and ran down to the water's edge after Gerda. But as they swam out to the island, he remembered the doctor's words. He thought about them as he spat the salt from his mouth, following in the creaming wake of Gerda's heels, and he realized that he loved her. They hauled themselves up on their usual rock on the island and trailed their toes in the sea.

'You're very quiet this afternoon, David,' she said.

'Sorry. I was thinking.'

'Nice thoughts?'

'Oh, very nice.' He took her hand and smiled at her. She smiled back and edged closer to him until their arms were touching from wrist to shoulder. They *were* nice thoughts, he decided. The decision had been taken for him. Now that he knew he loved her, he would have to take this extra factor into account. That was all. But it was a damned awkward factor in a situation that was complicated enough already. To hell with it, he thought, as he stood up, shouted 'Race you back' and dived off the rock.

Only two days later another complication cropped up. Having previously signed the visitors' book at Government House, at Hassan's instigation, David had been invited to a garden-party there to celebrate the King's Birthday. At first he had thought of skipping it but was finally persuaded by Hassan that he ought to put in an appearance. And so, reluctantly, he had put on his best linen suit and had driven to Government House, there to mingle with several hundred strangers whose thin chatter almost drowned the noise of a selection from *Iolanthe* that was being thumped methodically to death by a military band.

David endured the purgatory for over an hour. People

whom he did not remember knowing continually nodded and smiled at him; at times he felt his cheek muscles growing stiff through the mechanical grin into which they were stretched. David's only consolation was the sight of Apps, looking even more hot and miserable than he himself felt, in a ceremonial tunic that buttoned up to the neck. When the great moment arrived for the Governor and his wife to parade slowly across the lawns and stop for a gracious word or two in front of certain honoured guests, David edged away to the outskirts. He saw Major Collings standing nearby in the crush of people who hoped to be favoured with a nod and a smile from the Governor. Collings winked and brought his right hand down in a chopping movement. The wink and the gesture seemed sinisterly knowing to David and the smile that followed them almost the leer of a fellow-conspirator. He left soon afterwards but the thought troubled him as he drove back to his bungalow, changed his clothes and drove out to Kyrenia. It was as though Collings shared a private joke with him and had hinted obscurely at his knowledge. All the way to Kyrenia the memory of that fleeting incident prodded at him.

He had not long to wait for the solution. As soon as he called for Gerda, she pulled a slip of paper out of her bag and said, 'David, see what came for me in the afternoon post.'

He took it from her. The note was anonymous, laboriously inked in capital letters (probably with the left hand, he thought, judging by the quavering strokes) on a sheet of exercise paper that might have been torn from a cheap notebook. It read: 'WHY DOES FLINT PRETEND HE WAS IN THE PAY CORPS? ASK HIM WHAT HE REALLY DID IN THE WAR.'

The long silence was broken by Gerda. 'What did you do in the war, David?' she asked quietly.

He took his time by tearing up paper into strips, then crumpled it in his fist. 'You know who wrote this, don't you?' he said. 'I recognize Henshaw's fine Italian hand.'

'Fine Italian hand? I do not understand you. It is bad writing and not Italian, I would think.'

'That is a saying,' he explained. 'It means "unpleasant", "underhand"'. What did I do in the war? I'll tell you. I served in the Commandos and later in the Special Air Services.' He caught the look on her face. 'No, I didn't do anything disgraceful, if that's what you're thinking.'

'But why did you tell everybody that you were in the Pay Corps? I could understand a man making claims the other way round but this is so—so strange. It is a good thing to serve in the Commandos and the Special—whatever-you-called-it, isn't it?' Her face was screwed up with wonder.

He smiled. 'Oh yes, it's quite a good thing, I suppose.' He thought quickly. 'The explanation is rather silly, really. You see, after the war a lot of men tried to cash in—to exploit—their service. They went on calling themselves Major this and Captain that. It made me sick to see them trying to climb the social ladder on the strength of a wartime rank they were lucky to get. So, whenever anyone asked me what I served in, I got stubborn and told them the first non-combatant job that came into my head. Coming over on the boat here, the same question was asked and I said the Pay Corps this time. Once I'd said it, I was landed with it. That's the whole story. Simple—and pretty silly.'

She began to laugh. 'So then you didn't run away in battle or get—what do you call it?—marshalled by the court?'

'Court-martialled. No such luck. You know, they say

the good soldier is the one who isn't found out. That was me all right.'

'But why should anyone send me a note like that?' she asked.

'It wasn't just anyone. For my money it was Henshaw. And you know why he did it. Because he's infernally jealous of me.'

'I wonder why,' she said innocently.

David laughed but secretly he was worried. On two counts. Henshaw must hate his guts to have gone to such lengths. And Henshaw must have some access to wartime records in order to check up so quickly. Perhaps a friend in the Military Secretary's department back at the War Office. That might be the answer. But if Henshaw could find out the truth, why could not anyone who was sufficiently interested do the same? And if the word got round, it would make him, David, a marked man. His very effort at appearing inconspicuous through minimizing his war-career might now have the reverse effect. That explained Collings's leer and odd gesture. Somehow he would have to deal with Henshaw--and quickly. He shrugged his shoulders in some confusion and forced his attention back to Gerda. He hoped to God that she had accepted his *ad lib* excuse.

It seemed she had for she had some interesting news. She told him that her uncle was getting tired of the heat and humidity of Kyrenia. In some old book he had come across a reference to sacred rites that had been held on Mount Olympus thousands of years ago. He had decided to kill two birds with one stone by getting away from Kyrenia for a few days and doing some field-work on the coolness of the mountains. There might be ruins of a temple or an altar on Mount Olympus. None of the authorities he had consulted referred to the existence of any ruins and it would be a feather in his cap, if,

single-handed, he could discover them. He wanted to leave just as soon as preparations were made, perhaps in two or three days.

When she had heard his news, Gerda had diffidently suggested that perhaps David could go along with them. If there was any fetching or carrying or climbing to be done, another man might be useful. To her relief and surprise her uncle had put forward no objections. In fact, he had welcomed the idea, provided that David could spare the time for the trip.

'You know, he likes you, David,' she said. 'I can't think why—he's usually such a good judge of character, too.'

He swung a playful punch at her which she dodged.

'Do say you can come,' she went on. 'We shan't be gone for more than two weeks at the most. Besides, if you were wanted back in Nicosia at short notice, you could always drive down in a couple of hours—and come back again.'

'I see it all now,' said David. 'It's not me you want—it's my car for a free trip there and back. Aren't I right?'

'But of course. Why else would we think of you?'

He aimed a slap at her behind but she twisted away from it in time. 'Do you think you can come?' she asked.

He thought for a moment or two. He could always keep in touch with Hassan from Troodos. And while he was on the trip to Mount Olympus, he might be able to get away for an hour or so and do some reconnoitring. Reconnaissance was a vital preliminary in battle and on this occasion would be doubly important. Now that that bastard Henshaw was making him a marked man there must be no slip-ups.

'Yes, I'd love to come,' he said.

The rest of the day followed the usual pattern. A swim and a bathe in the sun and then a few drinks and dinner at the Dome Hotel. Doctor Andersen seemed genuinely glad that David was coming on the trip with

them. He must have known that their feelings for each other were ripening but he gave no hint of his knowledge. That was decent of him, thought David. Some uncles with an attractive niece in their care would have quickly asked him his intentions or would have chaperoned the young couple so assiduously that they were never out of sight. But Doctor Andersen seemed to trust him implicitly with the result that his own feelings of liking and respect for the doctor increased.

What in fact were his intentions? he asked himself. Hassan's bantering rankled with him. He really did love Gerda. No doubt about that. His life, which had seemed adequate enough before he met her, would be strangely incomplete if she were to go out of it now. And she seemed to be fond of him as well, perhaps more than fond. If it weren't for this damnable business of having to deal with Knelle, he could put their relationship on a more solid basis, ask her to marry him. But he could do nothing until the other matter was cleared up. If it went wrong by any chance, she must not get involved in the subsequent notoriety. He could just picture the headlines. 'Murderer's Fiancée Sobs In Court'. 'Condemned Man's Last Meeting with Girl he Loved'. Hell, no. She must be kept out of that at all costs. But once the job was over and he was in the clear, then he could speak out. With the twenty thousand pounds coming from Sterner, he might even settle down in Sweden and marry her there. Sweden was a clean, cold country, he had heard. It might be fun to tear up all his roots and settle down for good in a new place. If only someone would put an end to this eternal indecision. The worst part of war was always the waiting about.

David was restless that evening, so much so that Gerda remarked on it after dinner. They were sitting on the balcony with her uncle and David was continually

shifting in his seat or getting up to stare out to sea and then sitting down again.

'What is the matter, David?' she asked. 'You are like—what is it the English say?—a cat on hot stones.'

'Bricks,' he corrected her mechanically.

'Well, bricks then. Perhaps you spent too long in the sun this afternoon. Don't say you are sickening for something—just when we are planning our trip to the mountains.'

David seized the half-excuse. 'But it's so hot and humid tonight. Don't you feel it, sir?' he asked Doctor Andersen.

'Yes, I notice it.' More and more as time goes on. I like Kyrenia in the daytime but at night it is as though someone took a blanket out of boiling water, wrung it out and draped it over the town. It is so hot and airless and the heat is moist, which makes it worse.'

'That's exactly how I feel,' David said. 'Gerda doesn't seem to turn a hair but I feel I've just stepped out of a Turkish bath.' He took out a handkerchief and mopped his face. He did indeed feel hot and sticky but that was not the main cause of his restlessness.

Gerda broke the silence. 'I have a brilliant idea,' she said. 'Why don't we go for a swim?'

'What, now?'

'Yes, why not? Our costumes will be dry. We could drive out to Snake Island, undress on the beach—there'll be no one there at this time of night—have a swim, dress again and come back. It wouldn't take an hour.'

The idea appealed to David. He wanted to work off his pent-up energy and, much as he liked Doctor Andersen, he would prefer to be alone with his niece. He turned to the doctor and said, 'What do you think, sir?'

'I think Gerda is mad. But then I seem to be approaching the age when all young people under thirty strike me

as insane. If a swim will give you relief from this heat, by all means go and have your swim.'

'You'll come with us?'

'I? Come with you? No, I'm too old to be capering about a beach in the moonlight. I'll stay here and read for a while and then go off to bed. Don't be too late, Gerda. We have much to get ready before we leave for the mountains. And don't swim out too far, will you?'

'No, Uncle, I promise.'

'You look after her, David,' Doctor Andersen went on. 'If she tries to swim out too far, you have my authority to give her a good smack and haul her back into shallow water.' He smiled indulgently at his niece.

'Always providing I can catch up with her,' David said.

'Well, off you go then. Oh, one last point, Gerda. Please try to make as little noise as you can when you come back.' He turned to David. 'I am a very light sleeper and usually, just when I am enjoying some pleasant dream, I am woken up by a noise in the next room that suggests a herd of wild elephants has arrived by mistake. It is Gerda, getting ready for bed after an evening with you. She has an uncanny knack of knocking over things that make the most noise when they fall. She is a clumsy girl, I fear, David.' He patted her arm and looked fondly at her in a way that robbed his words of all sting. 'Well, enjoy yourselves.'

They collected their swimming things and a couple of bath towels. David bundled them inconspicuously under his arm as they walked down the main staircase of the hotel and out to the station waggon that was parked on the strip of ground in front of the hotel. Hassan had a new car on order for him but it was not likely to be ready for a few weeks. He drove slowly along the winding road towards Snake Island, grateful for the current of sluggish

air that was provoked by the car's motion. He swung off the road and drew up under the usual clump of carob trees. He switched off the engine and said to Gerda, 'Lead on, Macduff.'

'What did you call me?' she asked.

'Macduff. Don't you know—that's a quotation from Shakespeare.'

'Oh, is it? The only duff I've ever heard of is some kind of English pudding. For a moment I thought you were calling me something rude.'

'Heaven forbid,' he laughed. 'No, all that means is "Come on—let's get cracking".'

'Ah, now you're speaking real English.' He caught the flash of her teeth and her eyes as she smiled at him in the moonlight. The moon was nearly full and it shone with a soft brilliance that would have been rare in England. The white sand shimmered under its light and the pools of dark shadows seemed almost palpable, as though one could lean down and scoop up a handful of velvety darkness. They crunched across the beach to their usual spot. A faint edge of milkiness showed where the sea met the beach and they could hear the quiet dragging and pulsing of the sea against the shore.

They halted and hesitated. Then David suggested that they should turn back to back and undress, as there was no cover nearby. Gerda laughed and said, 'You're so thoughtful, David dear. And so modest, too. A girl feels safe with you. It's such a comfort—but rather dull, of course.'

He slapped her lightly and then they turned to undress. He could hear the rustle of her clothes as she slipped them off and he felt excited. Quickly he pulled off his own shirt and trousers and pulled on his trunks. They were gritty against his flesh. 'Ready,' he shouted.

'Well, I'm not. Oh, David, you're looking,' she said.

'No, I'm not. Anyway, how would you know I was looking, if you hadn't turned round yourself?'

'I don't have to turn round to read your nasty mind. I'm ready now myself, so we can all turn round.'

He turned to face her. Her sunburnt body looked dark against the white of her two-piece costume. She was tying a silk scarf around her hair. 'I don't want to get it wet at this time of night,' she said.

Moved by an impulse, David walked over and kissed her. She seemed to tremble a little in his arms. Perhaps it was the cool night air. She clung to him for a long minute and then broke away. 'Now, now,' she smiled. 'We came for a swim. Let's get that over first.'

He felt excited again as he saw the implication of the word 'first'. Hand in hand, they ran down to the sea and waded in. It was warm and silky against their thighs, shining with a faintly luminous quality.

They swam out perhaps fifty yards and then drifted gently with the rise and fall of the sea. They lay in the path of the moonlight. It was a moment pregnant with peacefulness. Neither of them spoke to break the spell until David said softly, 'Shall we be getting back?'

'Yes,' she whispered. Side by side they swam back to the shore. Without speaking, they walked up the beach, dried themselves hurriedly and then fell back on to the warm sand into each other's arms. They lay there until David could feel the heat of her body mingling with his. They were locked in an unbroken kiss. Then she twisted away and reached for the knot that tied the upper part of her costume behind her neck. She tugged it loose and threw it down. She peeled off the rest of her costume in one sinuous movement and then lay back again. 'That's better,' she said quietly. She held open her arms to him and drew him down.

Minutes later they lay in peace. David was gently

kissing her cheek, following the line of her jawbone with his lips. He could taste the dried salt of the sea that roughened her skin. Without thinking he said softly, with his lips close to her ear, 'I do love you, you know. Will you marry me, darling?'

She laughed ripely. 'Do you really mean that? You don't have to make an honest woman of me.'

'Don't tease me,' he said. 'It's not every day I ask a young woman to marry me.'

'And it's not every evening I let a young man make love to me on the beach. Do you really love me, David? It isn't just the moon and the sea and the opportunity?'

'No, I swear it's not. I think I fell for you the first time I saw you.'

'Come, darling, I can hardly believe that. You had a very strange way of showing your love that first time.'

He laughed at the memory. 'Well, the second time we met, anyway. Look, let's not argue just which day or hour I first fell in love with you. Let's accept the fact that I love you now. Well, will you marry me or not? This magnificent offer will not be repeated indefinitely.'

She raised a hand and fondled his cheek. 'I do love you, David. This wouldn't have happened if I hadn't. And I think you'd be a nice person to marry. But we don't know much about each other yet. We've only met on holiday, as it were, and neither of us knows what the other is like in our own surroundings. Besides, I could hardly dash off and leave my uncle in the middle of his expedition. He needs me to look after him.'

'So you'd prefer him to me?' It was a half-joking remark but behind it David felt a twinge of jealousy.

'No, that's silly. But he is my own kin and he'd be lost without me. There's no great hurry, David. Over the months to come, we'll get to know each other better and if we're still in love when the time

comes for Uncle Johan and me to go back home, then we can get affianced, engaged, I think you call it. We could meet again in England—or in Sweden, if you could manage it—and if we still feel the same we can get married.'

'I always heard Swedish girls were cold-blooded, now I know.'

'They can be hot-blooded at times—as you've just found out. No, David, this is not being cold-blooded, it's just being sensible. We can afford to wait—'

'Barring accidents,' he reminded her.

'Yes, barring accidents,' she added. 'When I get married, I want it to be for ever. I want to be sure of the man I marry. I like everything about you, David, but I don't really know the real you. You could be anything for all I know.'

'A wanted murderer, perhaps?' he suggested.

'No, not that. And don't make fun of me, please. I'm trying to be serious. That's one thing I could never suspect you of—murder.'

'Why not?'

'That's a silly question. You just aren't the type. I can tell it.'

'Thank you very much. Can you tell whether I'm capable of robbing a bank, for instance? I could be a confidence trickster—or a bigamist, maybe.'

'Certainly not a bigamist, darling. You're not experienced enough with women to be that.'

'Thank you for that nice compliment. You have a wonderful way of deflating a man's ego, my sweet.'

'It is a compliment, David. I don't want some other woman's cast-off Casanova. I like to catch them young and train them.'

'The way you did with Ian Henshaw?'

'That's unfair. But it proves the point I'm trying to

make. I thought he was wonderful at first but, as you know, I soon found out the truth. Wouldn't it have been terrible if I'd married him before I found out? Not that he ever asked me. He had ideas, but marriage wasn't one of them.'

David was suddenly filled with an enormous, black rage. 'This is a rotten question to ask,' he said, 'and slap me down if you want to. But did you and Henshaw—ever—?' His voice trailed away.

'You mean, did we ever do what you and I have just done? No, darling, I promise you we didn't. He wanted to, of course, he was always pestering me to and, to be honest with you, if he'd gone on long enough, I might have said "Yes" just to stop him worrying me. Most women give in if a man is persistent enough. It's a kind of backhanded compliment that flatters them. Fortunately, Ian lost his patience too soon. He decided he could get quicker results through drink—and you know how that finished up.'

'But if he'd kept sober and kept on asking you, you would have given in?'

'David, you mustn't ever be jealous of me, or of what I was before you met me. I love you now and that should be enough. That's what I mean by saying we must get to know each other better. I don't want you to think I'm just a doll that's been taken out of its wrappings and handed over to you brand new.'

'Fair enough,' he said. He still felt an unsatisfied ache but he was wise enough not to press the point. He folded her in his arms and kissed her.

'That's better,' she said when he freed her.

'You're terribly sweet,' he said. 'How about letting me use up a bit more of my hot blood?'

'No, darling. Not now. Really, it's too big a risk a second time, unless you're prepared for it. And I can

see from your guilty look you're not. I think you want to force me into marrying you.'

'It's a thought,' he said.

'Then keep your thoughts to yourself. There'll be plenty more times, David dear. Besides, romantic as the setting is, the sand is making my back itch.'

'Let me scratch it for you.' He leant over and began to caress her back. It was firm and strong under his hand. 'I've got to start in early and learn a husband's duties.'

'You're very sure of yourself.'

'No, I'd rather be sure of you.'

'That's a very nice thing to say. I don't think you need worry.'

He kissed her again and then they stood up to dress.

Then they walked arm in arm up the beach back to the station waggon. He pulled up before they reached the hotel and kissed her hard, pressing down on her lips until he could feel the firm teeth behind. 'That's to be getting on with,' he said.

'You're very sweet, David,' she said, a little breathlessly. 'I'm not so sure it was wise to suggest waiting.'

'Trust a woman to change her mind. I don't need time to get to know you. You're just a typical woman at heart.'

'Away with you, as my uncle would say. Thank you for a lovely evening, David.'

'Thank you,' he said. He opened the car door for her, held her for a moment and then lingered to watch her walk up the hotel steps with the lilting stride he knew so well. She turned at the top of the steps and blew him a kiss. In that second he knew he loved her and his heart sang at the thought of it.

It was the slight hiss of indrawn breath that saved him. David had returned late from Kyrenia that night; he

garaged the car, switched off lights and engine, then swung the gates to and fiddled the hasp of the padlock into place. His back was to the short drive with its dark shrubbery. He felt relaxed and tired.

As the hasp of the padlock clicked home, he just heard the faint hiss behind him—the involuntary noise that escapes from clenched teeth when a man strikes out viciously. David twisted and flung himself to the right. Something heavy crunched down on to his left shoulder; pain seared down to his finger-tips and his left arm went numb.

He let the force of the blow send him to his knees, then pivoted against the garage door and dived for his attacker's knees, grabbing with his right hand. They both crashed to the ground. David felt the cosh thump against the earth a few inches from his face as the falling man took another swipe at him. His left arm was still numb, so David rolled forward to get the weight of his body across the hand that held the cosh. As he rolled, he punched at the other's groin. His fist bored into flesh and his attacker jerked and groaned.

David's left hand was still tingling from the first blow but he managed to get a grip with it on his assailant's coat. Levering the man forward with his left hand, he began to punch away with his right. Suddenly a hand came up out of the darkness and forking fingers jabbed at David's eyes. The thumb caught his left eye. He jerked his head back and lost his grip. His attacker wriggled free and David squatted, tense for the next move. But the man scrambled to his feet and ran off into the darkness. David let his pent-up breath drift slowly out from his nostrils. He clenched his left fist gingerly, to help push himself to his feet. There was something hard in his hand. Limping a little and rubbing his sore eye with his right hand, he walked the few paces to his bungalow. Entering and

switching on the lights, he opened his left hand and looked at the hard, little object. It was a Royal Artillery tunic button sewn to a strip of khaki cloth.

Henshaw, he muttered to himself and tossed the brass button on to a table. The fellow must be a maniac. He didn't stop short at anonymous notes and scandal-mongering. He had to do the job in style and try to beat up—murder, perhaps?—anyone who cut him out with a girl-friend. David realized that, if it hadn't been for his years of training which had sent him almost unconsciously swerving to the right when he heard the hiss of indrawn breath behind him, to the right because a right-handed assailant usually swings from right to left and cannot at the last split-second alter the direction of the blow, he would now have been lying in a crumpled heap by the garage-doors. Hell, he thought, something would have to be done about Henshaw—and at once.

David raced into his bedroom and tore off his light-coloured suit. He pulled on an old pair of dark flannels and a blue polo-necked sweater. Rummaging through another drawer, he found his Commando knife in a sheath and slipped it into his hip-pocket. He changed into a pair of crepe-rubber soled shoes and grabbed an old cap as he ran out of the bungalow.

He could not remember hearing a car engine starting up when his attacker had run off into the darkness. With any luck he might have marked Henshaw so that he would not risk taking a cab back to his camp. Or perhaps he was playing safe anyway and was returning on foot so that no taxi-driver could remember picking him up in the neighbourhood of David's bungalow. David hoped so. He had to catch up with him before he reached camp. Once Henshaw had gone past the guard at the entrance, there was no hope of getting at him. David could get into the camp easily enough. He doubted

whether peacetime British sentries could match wartime Germans' alertness. But he had no idea which of the hundreds of tents might be Henshaw's; no doubt Henshaw, as a comparatively junior officer, shared a tent with someone else.

David backed the station waggon out of the garage, turned and drove fast along the main road leading west out of Nicosia. The Gunner camp was about two miles out of town. As he drove, he worked his left shoulder backwards and forwards to keep it from getting stiff. It was still very sore and a sullen anger seeped into David's mind. It was a typical trick for a little bastard like Henshaw to sneak up behind a man and cosh him in the dark. But he would be sorry he hadn't done the job in style before he was much older.

David passed two or three groups of soldiers on their way back to camp, singing in the deep-chested, unaffected way of the Englishman who has a few drinks on board. But there was no sign of Henshaw. Less than fifteen minutes had passed since the attack outside the garage. Unless he had run all the way back to camp—and he could hardly go pelting up a main road in front of men from his own regiment without comment—David must have caught up with him by now. There was another possibility, thought David, as he slowed down on approaching the main guard at the entrance of the camp. Henshaw could have had an all-night pass and be staying at an hotel in Nicosia. But that would be too risky. If the attack had succeeded, Henshaw would have needed the alibi of spending the night in camp.

He drove past the entrance at reduced speed. As he was wondering what to do next, he saw that a car had just pulled up a couple of hundred yards up the road. The tail light winked redly. It was a taxi. He swung the station waggon into the shadows and switched off lights

and engine. In the diffused beams of the taxi's headlights, he saw that a man in Army uniform was standing by the driver's seat feeling in a side pocket for money. Even at that range David could see that the man appeared to keep his face averted from the driver. The man was of medium height, thinnish. It had to be Henshaw.

David removed the ignition key and slid out of the station waggon. He crossed the road fast, bending low as he went, then worked his way up the hedge, peering for a gap. He found one and wriggled through, just as the taxi backed and came driving down the road back towards Nicosia. Its headlights splashed jets of light through the hedge as it went by. Then all was darkness again. David knew that Henshaw—if it was he—must be aiming to cross the double-apron barbed-wire fence that surrounded the camp. It would be guarded, of course, but you didn't have to be a Commando to slip through when some drowsy sentry's back was turned. Staring through the darkness David could see a clump of trees outlined against the paler sky. The copse ran to within a hundred yards of the wire fence. He guessed that Henshaw would be making his way to this copse and would wait up there until he saw his chance to scramble through the fence. David had to reach it first.

Hunched forward, he ran lightly over the powdery earth. He reached the edge of the wood about half-way along its side. Slipping between the two nearest trees, he crouched by their roots. It was dark in the wood and, half-lying on the ground, he could see nothing, although he strained his eyes until they smarted. Gradually the indistinct outlines of tree-trunks emerged; a faint glimmer of light showed the far edge of the copse, perhaps ten yards away. But still he could not see Henshaw, nor hear him. For a long moment David thought that he must have skirted the wood. He swore under his breath. Then, away

to his left, he heard a crashing in the undergrowth and a muttered swear-word. A cicada was rasping away nearby but soon its tiny shrillness was blotted out by Henshaw's noisy approach. The sounds suggested that he would pass within a yard or two of David's hiding-place. He was tense, his body felt as taut as a violin string but one section of his mind held contempt for the quarry. Although Henshaw suspected nothing, he was making a poor job of entering the camp secretly. Then, a few feet from David's position, he blundered into a tree, said 'Christ' and stopped to light a match. The foxy features were cartooned by the sudden flare. It was Henshaw right enough. David could hardly credit his stupidity but he had no time to think about it. Slipping round the side of the tree, he coiled up, then sprang.

As he cannoned into Henshaw, he hooked his left leg around the other's ankles. Henshaw's startled shout was cut off as his face hit the earth. David fell across him, pinioning him by the weight of his body, his left elbow grinding Henshaw's left shoulder against the ground. David slid the Commando knife from his hip pocket and poised it an inch from Henshaw's right ear. His wrist went stiff to take the strain of forcing the knife-point in and down behind the angle of the jaw-bone. But then he paused. The stupidity of killing Henshaw flashed on him. It would accomplish nothing, only add to the major risk.

His breath hissed out as he unclenched his jaws. He stabbed the knife upright into the ground, then felt almost caressingly for Henshaw's throat with his empty right hand. He levered his left hand under the other man's neck until the fingers of both hands met. Then he picked steadily, feeling for the throbbing jugular. Henshaw's body thrashed and squirmed but David anchored him with the weight of his legs and shoulders until the writhing suddenly stopped. Henshaw went slack.

He would be unconscious for a minute or two, David knew. Long enough for him to get clean away. He rose, picked up the knife and slipped it back into his hip-pocket. Then nudging the flaccid heap with his toe in contempt, he slid away into the darkness, back towards the road and the station waggon. He felt better now and yet glad that he had not finished off Henshaw. It would be far safer to cable Sterner and ask him to exert some influence with the War Office to get the man posted away from Cyprus. That was it, thought David, as he drove back towards Nicosia. He would talk to Hassan about it in the morning.

(vii)

Two days later, arrangements were complete for the trip to the mountains. Doctor Andersen had hired a car and a driver to take the luggage and his field equipment up to Troodos. With rare tact he also announced that he would travel with the hired car, leaving Gerda and David to go by themselves in the station waggon. He had rented a cabin for a fortnight which would be long enough, he estimated, to complete his field-work. They would leave Kyrenia on the Monday morning and would probably picnic half-way along the route, reaching Troodos in the early afternoon. That would give them the rest of the day to settle in and find their bearings. Mount Olympus was a dome-shaped summit which was an hour's easy climb through the pine trees from Troodos. The expedition would begin in earnest on the Tuesday morning. David gathered that his only function was to act as footman and carrier for the doctor and make himself generally useful and amiable. Although he knew nothing of archæology, he was beginning to get infected by the doctor's zeal and to his surprise found himself hoping that they might make some vital discovery, perhaps unearth

a prehistoric altar that would bring fame, if not fortune, to Doctor Andersen. Yet he didn't much mind if the expedition drew a complete blank. He would have a whole fortnight in Gerda's company and he knew from his earlier reconnaissance of the mountains that there must be many quiet places high up in the resin-scented forests where he could get to know her even better.

His mission was always there, like a hollow tooth that needed only a cold drink to bring back the ache. He would forget it for hours and then a chance remark from Gerda might force it to his attention again. Occasionally he wondered whether he might even tell her about it but he always decided that he could not risk it. She could easily recoil in horror from a man who was about to kill and who could blame her? And even if, by some strange chance, she should approve of his mission, it would be unfair to make her an accessory. No, it was one secret that would always keep them that much apart, even in their most intimate moments.

The evening before they were to leave, Doctor Andersen ran through the arrangements for the last time. David was mildly surprised by the thoroughness with which the doctor had planned every last detail. Anyone would imagine, he thought, that they were off to the South Pole or to the source of the Amazon, instead of a fifty or so miles' trip when they would be within shouting distance of civilization the whole time. But the doctor was being almost Teutonic in his attention to detail. He had listed the equipment down to the last pick and shovel and coil of rope. He even included a spare ribbon for his portable typewriter in case the current one wore out too soon.

David's own requirements fitted comfortably into one suitcase. He was to take a tweed sports coat and a pair of corduroy trousers, for the temperature dropped steeply at

nigh, in the mountains, a pair of heavy brogues for climbing, a light-weight suit, shorts, spare shirts and underwear and his shaving tackle. At the last moment he decided to include a small automatic pistol, an Italian .32 Beretta, that Hassan had given him a few days before, and two clips of ammunition. He felt rather foolish when he rolled the holstered pistol up inside a pair of socks and thrust the bundle into one corner of his suitcase. It was a neat toy and it took up little room but he couldn't imagine himself using it anywhere on the slopes of Olympus. There were no wild animals likely to attack travellers. Nor was it possible that he would bump into Knelek and take a pot at him among the pine forests. For that matter, if shooting was imminent, he would have preferred a heavier-calibred gun like a Colt .45 or a Luger, or even a Smith and Wesson .38 revolver; something that threw a heavier chunk of lead than this dainty pea-shooter which was more suited to a woman. Still, one never knew: and with that platitude in mind he shut and strapped his case.

● He had arranged to call at the Dome Hotel at ten o'clock. Quarter to found him breasting the pass and swinging down the long bends towards the village. He had given Hassan an itinerary and had agreed to telephone him from Troodos every other evening in case there was news. Hassan's manner showed clearly that he disapproved of this jaunting off to the hills when there was serious work in the offing but he said nothing either to dissuade David or to tease him about the trip.

As always it was a clear summer morning with the sun already high and hot in the sky. As he came over the pass, the morning mist was peeling away from the sea and he could pick out the faint smudge of Turkey away on the distant horizon. He was a few minutes early and he pulled up to light a cigarette. He craned his neck to look back at

the ruins of St. Hilarion, a grey continuation of the grey, sheer rock that reared up against the sky. Snake Island was out of sight, tucked away to the north-west beneath a headland. He wondered whether the sand still bore the precious imprint of his and Gerda's bodies where they had writhed in the ritual of love three nights before. He smiled at the memory. He had never known a girl like her, never. As he flung away his cigarette end and leant down to switch on the engine, he thought that he would always remember this moment, the threshold of a holiday in the mountains with the girl he loved.

He pulled up outside the Dome Hotel, next to the hired car. Doctor Andersen was already supervising the packing of the luggage. He greeted David warmly but rather vaguely, as though he had more important things on his mind. Gerda was still up in her room getting ready and David went on up. Inside her room he kissed her and would have wanted more but she, too, seemed infected with her uncle's preoccupation and soon dragged him down to the hotel lobby. He was just carrying her suitcases towards the car and was twitting her about the extent of her luggage, asking if she had remembered her skis, anti-mosquito ointment and iron rations, when the receptionist of the hotel called him.

'Mr. Flint?'

'Yes,' he said, 'that's me.'

'You are wanted on the telephone, sir. Over here.'

'Who the hell can it be?' he said aloud. 'Excuse me, Gerda, a moment. It must be the Nicosia office. You see, they can't get on without me for a minute.'

'They've probably discovered there's some money missing from the safe,' she replied. 'Now I know why you're so generous.'

He stuck his tongue out at her, to the dismay of an elderly retired colonel and his lady who sat stiffly in the

lounge nearby. He picked up the telephone and said, 'Hallo. Flint speaking.'

'Ah, Mr. Flint, I have caught you in time then.' It was the high-pitched voice of Hassan and it twanged in his ear through a crackle of atmospherics. 'I have some urgent news for you.'

'Well, shoot then.'

'Shoot? Oh, you mean, tell you now. I am afraid I cannot. This is an open line. Anyone might hear us.'

'So what?'

'This is to do with a subject that you and I have often discussed. New information has come in from London.'

'It has? Can't you give me a clue?'

'I'm afraid not. It is vitally important. I can say no more.'

Hassan's voice reminded David of the bleating of a homeless goat. 'Well, if you can't or won't tell me over the phone, it looks as though the news will have to wait. I'm off to Troodos in a few minutes.'

'You must not go until you have heard this news.'

'What am I supposed to do then? Read your thoughts or something?'

'Please come back to Nicosia right away, Mr. Flint. I can only tell you this in person.'

'Come back to Nicosia? We're not going that way. Our route is along the coast road to Lapithos.'

'Mr. Flint, will you not understand? This new information is vital. Please do not forget that you are not a free agent. Mr. Stern is employing you to carry out his wishes.' There was an edge of menace in the falsetto voice.

David thought quickly. He suspected that this was another of Hassan's would-be jokes. Some trivial concoction just to upset his plans. He dared not set off for the mountains, however, without hearing the news, although

his trip to Nicosia would be a complete waste of time, he suspected. If he left now and drove fast, he could get back to the capital, see Hassan and catch up with the other car somewhere along the route. Hell, he'd better do it.

'Are you there, Mr. Flint?'

'Yes, still here. I was just thinking. Okay, you win. I'm leaving now, and I'll be with you in under half an hour. And God help you if you're pulling my leg.'

'This is no joke, Mr. Flint, I assure you.'

'Okay, see you soon. It had better be good.'

He rang off and went over to where Gerda was waiting on the hotel steps. 'It's a curse,' he said. 'Something urgent has cropped up and I'll have to dash back to Nicosia.'

'Oh, David, does this mean you're not coming with us after all?'

'Of course I'm coming. It'd take more than the Terrible Turk to keep me away. No, it'll only mean I'll be about an hour behind you. If I step on it and you don't hurry too much, I'll catch you up long before Troodos.'

'Shall I come with you?'

'No, better not, I think. You keep your uncle company. As that wretch Hassan is always saying, "He travels the fastest who travels alone." I'll get straight on now. Would you please tell your uncle what's happened. By the time he's decided how and where to tie on the luggage, I'll probably be ahead of you on the road.'

He slid his hand down the line of her cheek and tweaked her chin. 'Be seeing you,' he said and ran down the steps.

He did the seventeen-mile journey in under twenty-five minutes. He sprang out of the station waggon and strode into Hassan's office impatiently. 'Well, what's the news?' he asked.

Hassan looked up from the sofa. 'Ah, Mr. Flint, you

have come quickly. Please sit down. Will you have a chocolate?’

‘To hell with your bloody chocolates. Look, I’m in a hurry. Let’s not beat a’bout the bush. You’ve got some news and you’ve dragged me back here to listen to it. Right, I’m listening.’

Hassan picked out a chocolate, held it up in a careful scrutiny and slowly began to pluck the wrapping, twisting it delicately in his huge hands.

‘Come on,’ said David. ‘Stop playing the fool. What have you got to tell me?’

‘Just one thing, Mr. Flint. Knelle is definitely here in Cyprus. Mr. Sterner has sent incontrovertible proof.’ He minced each syllable separately.

‘All right. So he’s here. Who is it—Vandenk?’

Hassan held David in a glance that was almost gloating. He tossed the words casually into the silent room. ‘No, Mr. Flint. Knelle is not Vandenk. He is your friend—Doctor Andersen.’

PART IV
EXECUTION

(i)

THE SHOCK struck David like a physical pain. And yet, somehow, he seemed to have known it all along. 'You're crazy,' he muttered. 'It isn't true.'

'It is true, Mr. Flint. Here is the proof.' He tapped the sheets of flimsy airmail paper on the table beside him.

'But Doctor Andersen's a Swede, not a German. And he's not a doctor of medicine. He gets his rank from being an archæologist.'

'He's no archæologist, Mr. Flint. It is a fact that he went on a German expedition that visited Babylon but he was the medical officer of the party. That was all. It is all here, as I said. Read it for yourself.' He pushed the papers across the table.

David stared at the papers but did not touch them. 'Look, if this is a practical joke, it's in the worst possible taste.'

'It is no joke, Mr. Flint. I even wish, for your sake, that it were.'

'But the man's a Swede. His niece is Swedish. Or are you trying to make out that she's a German as well?'

'No, that part of the story is true enough. If you won't read the papers for yourself, let me tell you briefly what they say. Knelle is related to the girl. That much is true. He is really her cousin. His mother and hers were sisters, his mother being much the older of the two. They were both Swedish, of course, but his mother married a

German. The Knelle family lived in Germany and the mother never revisited Sweden as far as we know. She was killed in an Allied raid early in the war.

'When the war was over, Knelle himself slipped out of Germany and went back to Sweden. He saw his aunt, Gerda's mother, privately. Apparently he told her that he was wanted for some technical offence by the Allies. Nothing serious, of course, but it might ruin him if he were caught. He persuaded her to let him pose as Gerda's long-lost uncle under the name of Andersen. It was quite ingenious. There was at least twenty years' difference in their ages and also a certain family likeness. Gerda's mother's family, the Andersens, had been a big one with branches of it scattered over Europe. Owing to the war Gerda had never seen many of her relations. From his own mother, Knelle knew enough of the family history and background to get by. You may also be sure that he was clever enough to learn up the facts he didn't already know. Anyway, Gerda's mother agreed to the deception, an innocent deception as far as she knew. Knelle was introduced as Uncle Johan and settled down under his new disguise. He seems to have grown genuinely fond of his "niece".

'That might have been the end of the story but it appears that someone who had worked with him in Germany came to live in the district by accident. If the acquaintance happened to bump into him, the whole plan was wrecked. So Knelle decided to move on for a time. He must have recalled that expedition he had gone on and decided to pass himself off as an archaeologist. It was a clever move to take his niece with him on the trip. Who would suspect that a wanted wartime criminal would travel in the company of a young, innocent girl? So they set off and went across the Continent through Spain to pick up a ship for Italy and from there another to Cyprus. It was in Madrid, of course, that the two ex-Nazis

happened to see Knelle by chance. All the facts are down there,' he pointed to the papers, 'and they fit too well not to be true.'

During Hassan's monologue David had gradually been coming to his senses. His mind was still bruised from the impact of the news but he was beginning to think clearly again.

'So if it's true, Gerda knows nothing about it?'

'It is true, Mr. Flint. We must accept that fact. Presumably she does not know the truth. Knelle would be foolish to spread his secret unnecessarily, and to a woman above all. He may have told her that he spent much of the war in Germany. Many Swedes did that. But he would hardly tell her the whole truth.'

'But where's the proof of the story? The whole thing's too pat for my liking.'

'The proof is here, Mr. Flint. You remember I mentioned the German medical orderly who turned up the little bit of evidence about the scar on Knelle's wrist. You laughed at that at the time, rightly enough, and suggested we should arrange to examine everyone in Cyprus. It is perhaps a pity that we could not do so then. Anyway, Mr. Sterner decided the evidence was not as unimportant as you and I thought. He is a brilliant man and fate has given him that flair that perhaps we lack. He realized that here was the one man who must have got to know Knelle well—and not through a mask of pain like the patients in his hands who have testified for us. So Mr. Sterner arranged for the man to be flown over to London where he must have been interrogated very well—and no doubt offered a lot of money. He told everything he knew and uncovered the one mistake that Knelle had made. Towards the end of the war it happened that he and Knelle were taking cover in a shelter during a very bad raid. As men do when death may be very near, they talked freely without

thought of their different ranks. It was obvious by then that only a miracle could save Germany—and doctors are the last people to believe in miracles, although in their trade they need them the most. Knelle told him that if he came through the war he would make for Sweden. He even told the orderly the town he would go to. That was the one mistake. The man remembered the name and he told Mr. Sterner. Investigations were made at once through the Stockholm office. All the other facts came tumbling into place. Why, our people there even managed to obtain a photograph of the strange Uncle Johan from a private album. Here it is.' He tossed a small print towards David. It fell face upwards and David found himself staring at the well-known diffident smile.

He gathered himself quickly. 'But a picture doesn't prove anything,' he said. 'He could still be someone else.'

'No,' Mr. Flint. The ex-medical orderly swore an affidavit that the photograph, which was sent from Stockholm to London while he was still there, was a true likeness of the surgeon he had known as Knelle. If you look at the back of the print you will see a signature to that effect. Does that convince you?'

David did not answer. On the surface he was angry and bewildered but deep down in his brain something whispered that here was the truth. He fought to suppress it. 'I just can't believe it,' he said, almost to himself. 'Doctor Andersen is a mild, gentle sort of man. He's just not the type to have committed crimes like that. I tell you, I know him pretty well. It's inconceivable that he could be a complete swine like this Knelle.'

Hassan smiled at him, baring his gold tooth, and said softly, 'You English have a saying about when the devil is sick, he tries to be a saint. Is it perhaps possible that you have been deceived by appearances? Evil is not always written on a man's face for everyone to see.'

David wagged his head, like a boxer absorbing the effects of a hard punch. He did not reply. His mind was too confused.

Inexorably Hassan went on speaking in his soft voice. 'Here is yet another item that adds to the total. The German orderly has stated that Knelle suffered from a stomach complaint that is called colitis. The man you know as Doctor Andersen—has he the same illness?'

David nodded.

'You see, Mr. Flint, everything tallies. There can be no doubt about it. Mr. Sterner states in the report that they have checked and counter-checked the orderly's statement. He has been questioned for hours and made to repeat his story many times in case he might vary it by repetition. That is the classic way, I believe, of establishing whether a story is true or not. Mr. Sterner and his experts are convinced that it is true. By the way, I forgot something. Here is a personal note for you from Mr. Sterner.'

David took the piece of paper. He read it numbly. There were only a few lines altogether. It said:

'Dear David, The enclosed report will interest you. At last we have found out the truth. I expect you will be looking forward to some action after kicking your heels all these weeks. I don't know whether you have come across our man in your wanderings, but, if you haven't, Cyprus is a small place and he should not be difficult to locate. Good luck and look after yourself. I shall be looking forward very much to hearing how you get on—Yours very sincerely, Daniel Sterner.'

David gave a short, bitter laugh that was more of a snort. 'That could almost be funny,' he said. 'Quote—I don't know whether you have come across our man—unquote. Oh yes, I've come across him all right. Just enough to have him as a prospective uncle-in-law. Or it should be cousin now, shouldn't it?'

Hassan looked at him impassively. 'I am struggling against the temptation, Mr. Flint, of saying "I told you so"'. What, may I ask, do you intend to do now? After taking Mr. Sterner's money and enjoying yourself for many weeks, are you now going to throw in your hand? Would you like me to write to Mr. Sterner and say that his precious Mr. Flint can't take on the assignment because he got himself tangled up with the niece—or cousin—of his son's killer? Perhaps you intend to marry the girl and live happily ever after with her and her would-be uncle? Knowing all the time that you are shaking the hand that castrated at least one fine young man who just didn't happen to be a pure-blooded Aryan like you and Knelle. Would that suit you, Mr. Flint?'

David stood up. 'Don't push me too far,' he said softly. 'I'll get you if you make me do it.'

Hassan had not moved an inch. He looked up at David and grinned. 'That sounds better. But turn your feelings in a more profitable direction. I am not worth killing. Where are you going?' he added, as David strode to the door.

'I have an appointment at Troodos—remember? I must be getting on.'

'Let me know if you want any help,' Hassan called after him. 'If you really intend to do anything about it,' he addressed the door that slammed shut. He sighed and reached out for another chocolate. Life was very complicated, he thought, and impetuous young men made it more so than it need be. As he popped the chocolate into his mouth, he wondered whether Flint would summon up the nerve to kill Knelle. It was a nice point.

(ii)

David was wondering the same as he swung the station waggon westwards through the tree-lined suburbs of

Nicola and out past the Army huts near the airfield. He drove fast in the hope that by having to concentrate on his driving he would have no time for other thoughts. But a jingle went through and through his brain all the time—'Andersen is Knelle, Andersen is Knelle', it kept whispering to him. It must be true, he thought, the facts tallied however much he tried to twist them. And yet he could not assimilate the truth. The quiet, studious man who liked him and who gently bantered Gerda, who seemed to be the ideal uncle—how could he be a sadist like this creature Knelle? Perhaps there had been some monstrous mistake. What if the German orderly was playing a game of double bluff, protecting the real criminal by framing an innocent man? Had Sterner thought of that possibility? Maybe the story was too pat. It could be that this medical orderly had come across Doctor Andersen in Germany and had fallen foul of him in some way. Had then killed two birds with the one stone, implicating the innocent and protecting the guilty. Vandenk had been cleared but was Sterner convinced that he wasn't the wanted man? Vandenk sounded the part whereas Andersen was patently a decent man. There must be something in appearances. For all that old, fat Hassan said—and there was a real sadist, if you like—evil must sooner or later show up in a man's face.

And so his thoughts went round and round as he drove, like mice in a cage. But they always came back against the bars of the facts. However much he tried to find a way out, he had begun to realize, after an hour's furious driving, that Sterner's investigation must be right after all. Andersen was Knelle.

He began to think next about Gerda. She must be innocent, even Hassan had agreed with that. But that made the situation worse if anything. If Gerda knew about and approved her uncle's—cousin's—crimes, then

she would share his guilt. In that case David would tear her out of his heart, agonizing though it would be. No one could love a bitch who lived happily with an acknowledged sadist. But she obviously didn't know the truth about her would-be uncle. However he looked at it, David knew that he had probably lost her. He could either drop the mission and go away for ever, cutting both Andersen and her out of his life abruptly, or else he could stay and attempt the task of killing the doctor. And even if he managed to do that without rousing her suspicions, their relationship was ruined. How could he marry a girl whose relative he had killed in cold blood? It was bad enough to think of living with her after killing some stranger, like Vandenk for instance. But her own cousin, the man she loved and respected. He could not touch her with the hands that had helped to despatch her cousin or wake in the morning to look at that face that would always vaguely remind him of the dead man. Andersen-Knelle would always come between them until loving her would be like caressing a corpse.

• And yet he knew, as he steered the car up the winding road into the foothills, that he would somehow have to go on. He could not bear to leave Gerda at this moment and loyalty to Sterner also pressed him on. The little man admired and trusted him. He could not go back to London and just tell him that his nerve had failed at the last minute or that he had been fool enough to get tangled up with Knelle's cousin. Sterner would probably say nothing but David could clearly picture the look that would be on his face when he heard the story. Anyway, Andersen—or Knelle, rather—was doomed. Now his identity was established, Sterner would have him killed, whoever did the job. And a replacement might be tougher than David, more cold-blooded about the whole business. Such a man might think nothing of engineering it so that both Gerda

and Knelle were killed together. He might organize a car accident when they were both travelling or he might kill Knelle in front of the girl by accident and then have to finish her off as well for his own neck's sake. David's mind revolted at the thought. He could not picture that superb body as limp as an old sack and the laughing eyes with a fixed, dead stare in them. He would have to stay on, if only to make sure that Gerda came to no harm.

About half-way up the mountain leading to Troodos there is an open glade on the right-hand side. A small stream steals away through the brackens and the grass is very green. Tall trees stand all round the glade and their foliage throws a green curtain across the sky so that the sunlight filters through and splashes their trunks and branches with a moving spray of light and shade. It is cool and quiet under the trees; the green light and the gentle rocking of the tree-tops make the traveller think fancifully that he is lying drowned on the bed of the sea.

David drove fast in third gear up the U-bend that half-enclosed the glade. He was watching the road and his thoughts were far away when, as he slowed to take the corner, he heard his name being shouted. He stopped the station waggon and looked round. There was Gerda, shouting and waving as she ran forward into the open. He caught a glimpse of the hired car parked under the trees with Doctor Andersen and the driver standing nearby. His mind snapped back into reality. He pulled the station waggon off the road and switched off the engine as Gerda came running up.

'David, darling,' she panted, 'I thought you were never going to stop.'

He thought quickly. 'That was just to fool you, sweetheart. I was going to drive on as though I hadn't seen any of you and then I'd have stopped about half a mile up the

road and free-wheeled back. Just to watch you panicking at the thought that I'd get right up to Troodos and not find you.'

'The conceit of the man,' she said. 'Well, here you are anyway. Just in time for lunch.' After a quick glance behind her, she leant through the open window of the station waggon and kissed him swiftly on the lips. 'Can you drive with one hand, David?'

'You ought to know.'

'I mean, up a winding road like this one?'

'Depends whether you're tired of life or not.'

'Oh well, if you're going to take that cautious attitude, I think I'll drive the rest of the way with Uncle Johan.'

He caught her hand. 'No, come with me, chum. Just sit and watch the view and be a good girl.'

'I'll try,' she said. 'Oh, I am looking forward to this holiday, aren't you?'

'Yes,' he said.

'You don't sound terribly excited. My mother was right. She said that a girl ought to keep a man at arm's length if she wants to keep his interest.'

'Play hard to get, eh? You just try it and I'll roll you over the side of Mount Olympus.'

He got out of the station waggon and they walked together towards the other car that was parked under the trees. Doctor Andersen looked up and smiled. 'Hallo, David,' he said. 'You didn't take long. We only got here ten minutes or so ago.' He scrambled to his feet as if about to shake hands but David avoided the contact by turning away to where Gerda had laid a table-cloth on the ground. He could not bring himself to touch Doctor Andersen's hand at this stage. When the doctor looked down again at the cups and saucers he was unpacking, David watched him out of the corner of his eyes. It was the same face, he thought, the quiet, averted gaze, the

different half-smile, the cleft chin and the slightly under-shot jaw, that made him look just a little like a 'good-tempered bulldog. Were the lips perhaps a shade fuller and redder than he had remembered and the downcast eyes a sign of guilt? He shook his head. If he had expected some dramatic revelation of the truth by looking closely at the doctor's features, then he was going to be disappointed. Hassan was right. Evil was not necessarily written on a man's face. He shivered.

Gerda looked up. 'Are you cold, David?'

'It is a bit nippy under the trees here. I haven't got used to it yet. I'll go and fetch my sweater from the waggon.'

When he returned the picnic meal was ready. They sat on blankets on the ground and ate cold meat and salad. The Cypriot driver sat in the front of his car and tore at a flat disc of unleavened bread, which was rather like a chupatty, with his sharp, white teeth.

There was little conversation during the meal. David could think of no light topic to keep the ball rolling. He found to his surprise that the keen air had given him an appetite and he concentrated on eating. Gerda too seemed content to attack the food, occasionally looking up with a full mouth to throw a distorted smile at David. Doctor Andersen pecked at his food mechanically. His mind was far away. In the past or in the future? David wondered. He decided that the doctor was thinking about the forthcoming expedition. By now he must feel quite safe from the past.

After they had drunk their coffee from a vacuum flask, Doctor Andersen seemed impatient to get on. 'I think we should be moving soon,' he said. 'It will take us nearly an hour to reach Troodos and another hour or so to get settled in. There will still be several hours of daylight left after that but I would rather like you younger and more active ones to reconnoitre a route up to the summit of the

mountain before it gets dark tonight. Then tomorrow morning we can start right away without losing either time or ourselves.'

'He means to work us hard, David,' Gerda observed out loud. 'Now I know why he was so keen for us to come with him.'

'As the ant said to the grasshopper, you have sung all the summer, now you will have to dance,' said her uncle, smiling.

'I never did like ants,' she said. 'Nasty, industrious creatures. No sense of fun. Come on then, Uncle—on with the dance.'

She swung to her feet in one easy movement and stood there looking down on them with her feet spread apart and hands on her hips. Glancing up at her, David was reminded of their first meeting on the beach when she had arrived to find him dozing. From where he sat she seemed as tall as the trees around her, and as straight and strong. Her fair head was framed against the green sunlight that crept through the ceiling of leaves above. He felt a sudden sick pain about his heart as he looked at her.

'Come on, you lazy ones,' she said. 'Do I have to haul you to your feet?'

They helped to stow away the picnic things in the back of the hired car. Gerda told her uncle that she would be travelling with David. He nodded assent and suggested that, as David's was probably the faster car, he should give the Cypriot driver several minutes' start. Doctor Andersen then described in minute detail for the fourth or fifth time since the trip had been planned the exact whereabouts in Troodos of the cabin he had rented—in case the hired car was out of sight when David reached the village. David nodded. How thorough could you be? he thought. He had been to Troodos before and knew that it was a straggling little village stretched out along the

sides of the roads that met there. Including the Governor's summer residence there could not be a hundred permanent buildings there, probably not many more than fifty. Anyone would think he was being given instructions on how to find some secluded place in the back streets of a city like London. There was something almost German in the doctor's earnest thoroughness. 'Almost German? By God, the man was a German! For a moment David had forgotten that this pleasant man with the scholarly stoop was Knelle, the sadist who carried out abominable experiments on the helpless. His eyes narrowed at the memory.

A few minutes later, he and Gerda watched the hired car disappearing up the steep road with a grinding of gears. As it turned the corner out of sight, she tugged at his sleeve. 'This is quite a romantic spot, don't you think, darling?'

'Yes, isn't it?'

'You don't sound very enthusiastic.'

'Why? Were you thinking of——' He swung round and looked at her. 'Gerda, my pet, I think there's just a trace of the nymphomaniac about you.' He grinned.

'Nympho—what? I don't know what it means but it sounds horrid.'

'It is rather horrid.' He took her gently in his arms. 'No, darling, not now.'

'No wonder they call the English a nation of hypocrites,' she said. 'Make love in the dark so that no one will see the guilty blush on your face. I believe you're getting tired of me, David.'

'Tired of you? Never say that. Never think it, even. Darling, here under these trees, I'll make you a promise. Whatever may happen to us, I'll always love you.'

'Sometimes you say the nicest things, David. But always is a long time, you know.'

'Not too long,' he said.

A few minutes later they climbed into the station waggon and David began to drive quite slowly up the tortuous mountain road, swinging the car round the hair-pin bends that corkscrewed up towards the summit. Gerda chattered gaily for a while, then began to yawn in the thin air. Finally she announced that she was going to have a nap and promptly nestled down against his shoulder. Her weight was comforting to him as he spun the wheel first left and then right, tracing out the curves of the road. He had to concentrate all the time for the road was narrow and sometimes there was a sheer drop of a thousand feet or more to the left when the road wound itself round a small ledge in the mountainside. But her body was warm and heavy against his shoulder and he could smell the fragrance of her hair, a pleasant strawy smell. Sometimes his left hand brushed against her sunburnt knees as he reached for the gear lever. Her body, relaxed in sleep, rolled from side to side with the swinging of the car. He would have liked to steady her by slipping an arm around her shoulders but he did not dare to drive one-handed. He contented himself by resting his left hand from time to time on her firm thigh. She was wholly adorable, he thought. He could not imagine having to give her up. Why not let things take their course? he thought. There might be some way out. But he could not think of any as he drove up to Troodos.

They found the cabin without any difficulty and spent the rest of the afternoon unpacking and having tea. The cabin was really a glorified wooden hut with three small rooms and a minute kitchen at the back. Doctor Andersen had already worked out the accommodation. The front room was to be a combined living- and dining-room. Gerda was to have one of the other rooms for her bedroom and he and David were to share the remaining one.

'Do you mind sharing with me, David?' he asked.

'Of course not, sir. I'll be delighted to.' The thought that men have been known to die in their sleep flashed into his mind but he suppressed it with a shake of his head.

There was a hotel a hundred yards up the road and Doctor Andersen had calculated that it would save a lot of time if they ate their main meals there and merely prepared their own breakfasts every morning. Lunch most days would be a haversack affair as they would be out on Mount Olympus.

By five o'clock they had settled in, the hired driver had been paid off and had begun the drive back to Kyrenia. The three of them were alone for the next fortnight. Doctor Andersen sat in a basket chair in the living-room. His sallow cheeks were redder than usual and he seemed to be on edge, excited. Yet every few minutes he was yawning deeply. David looked at him inquiringly.

'Please excuse my yawning,' said the doctor. 'It is not that I am bored, although after all these months with you, Gerda, my dear, that would not be unreasonable.' She shook a gay fist at him. 'I find it a little difficult to get acclimatized to the altitude. The air is bracing but it seems to take more of it to fill the lungs. Why don't you two take a stroll and find an easy path up to the top of the mountain. It will be daylight for at least another four hours and you should be able to get there and back in time. I can rest for a while and then we can meet for dinner at the hotel.' He looked at his watch. 'It is now quarter past five. Shall we say dinner at eight-thirty? That should give you time enough. I would rather you were back before dark on this first time out while the mountain is still strange to us.'

'But I'm sure David has been a Boy Scout, Uncle. He would never get lost.'

'But I might take the opportunity of losing you,' David said, 'pathfinder's badge or no.'

'Pig,' she said. 'There's no gallantry left in the men I know.'

'Away with you, then,' said Doctor Andersen. 'David, you're in charge. See that she does what you tell her.'

'Easier said t' n done,' David observed. 'Come on, junior, stand to attention when I spee' to you.'

They followed the Platres road for a quarter of a mile and then struck across country through the pine trees. The ground beneath them was spongy with fallen pine needles and the air smelt of resin. They rode up through the trees, climbing the gentle slope of Olympus. The going was easy and they skirted the few outcroppings of rock in their path. Soon the village of Troodos was out of sight. Far below they could hear the whining complaint of a car-engine driven in low gear up the Platres road but at the height they had reached everything was silent. No birds sang and the air was thin and very still. The sun had dropped below the reverse slope of Mount Olympus and the sky was pale and clear, tinged to the north-east by strips of fleecy pink clouds.

They stopped in a sheltered hollow.

'It sounds ridiculous,' said Gerda, 'but I feel as though I was in a church. It would be all wrong to talk loudly.'

'Yes, I've got that feeling too.'

'I wonder if we're near the site of Uncle's prehistoric holy ground.'

'If 't exists.'

'Oh, David, you mustn't say things like that. It would break Uncle's heart if he thought you didn't believe in his theory.'

'Well, do you?'

• 'That's a leading question. I don't know what to think. Sometimes I have the strange idea that Uncle would

rather spend his time looking for facts to support his theory than actually finding them. That might be an awful anti-climax.

'It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive,' he observed.

'How clever of you to put it like that, David.'

'Don't praise me. I was only quoting someone else.'

'You are a fraud. For a moment I thought you had said something really original.'

'I'm too honest. I should have let you go on thinking that.'

'We must be very near the top,' she said.

'Near enough.'

'Shall we stop here then? It'll soon be getting dark and then you'll come into your element, won't you?'

'Ass,' he said. 'But quite a nice ass.'

He kissed her and then, together, they lay back on the bed of pine needles under a copse of trees. He continued to caress and kiss her but there was no urgency in his movements. His emotions were slack and his mind troubled. As if to compensate, she clung eagerly to him, holding him tight until he caught some of her fire.

Afterwards they lay side by side, holding hands but otherwise with a significant gap of an inch or two between them. He was drained of thought and momentarily at peace. She broke the silence with a quiet, 'What is the matter, David? Is it me?'

He grasped her hand tightly. 'No, darling, it's not you. I had some bad news this morning and somehow I haven't got over it. I'm sorry.'

'Bad news? Can you tell me?'

For a second he was tempted to tell her the truth, here under the silent trees and the evening sky that was draining out its light. He ached to confide his secret to her. But

then he thought better of it. He could not burden her with the facts for ever after. He groped for another excuse.

'Word has come from London,' he began, 'They think I've enjoyed myself long enough. I'll have to be reporting back very soon.'

'How soon?'

'It depends. I ought to be able to spin it out for two or three weeks, perhaps a month. But not much longer.'

Oh, David, that is bad. But it's not tragic. Just because you'll be leaving soon it doesn't mean we'll never meet again. Or does it?'

'Of course we'll meet again. I could get myself posted to the Stockholm branch. No, it was a shock, that's all. I'd come to think they'd forgotten all about me. I'm feeling better already.'

She began to chuckle. 'For a moment I thought there was something wrong with me. And don't think I'd have let you get away—just like that. You've found yourself a very possessive female. I'm warning you.'

'Possess away,' he said, 'I can take it.' He leant over and gently rubbed the back of his hand against her cheek.

She pulled his hand against her lips and kissed it. 'That's my David. I feel much better now.'

For the first time that evening desire began to throb in him. Their love-making was short, keen and triumphant. They must have dozed off afterwards for when they came back to their senses, a chill breeze was creeping across the mountainside and stars were flickering in the dusk. David sat up with a start and looked at the luminous dial of his watch. 'My God,' he said, 'it's after nine. What on earth will your uncle think? Maybe he'll make you marry me now.'

She clung to him briefly. 'I'm beginning to think he might be right at that.'

They stood up. David flicked his lighter and cupped

his hand around it. Shadows 'wavered' and fell around them. 'If you walk into the hotel with all those pine needles on your back, it'll be a shotgun wedding,' he remarked.

° 'A shotgun wedding?'

'Yes. The father of the bride—in this case the uncle—will march the groom to the altar with a shotgun stuck in his back.'

'Not Uncle. He likes you, David. He likes you very much.'

'I was only joking. Come on, let's go. We can repair our faces a bit nearer civilization.'

'You can wipe that lipstick off your mouth but nothing will remove the circles under your eyes,' she said.

'And whose fault are they?' He slipped an arm round her waist and slowly, stumbling now and then on the dark hillside, they made their way back to Troodos. Fortunately they met Doctor Andersen on the road outside the hotel where the light was bad. They explained that they had lost their way coming back and he accepted the explanation without comment. He left them to go and have dinner while he went on alone to the cabin.

Later that evening, David kissed Gerda good night outside her room and then tiptoed into the room he was sharing with the doctor. There was a small hurricane lamp burning in one corner and by its vague light he could see that the doctor was asleep. He stood there watching the easy breathing of the sleeping man, the relaxed, defenceless face. A smile twitched one corner of his mouth as he moved restlessly on the pillows and then sagged back into sleep. It would be so easy to kill him now, thought David. One hand on his throat and the other holding a pillow over his face to stifle the noise: it would be all over in three minutes. He arched his hands and took a hesitant pace nearer. Then he halted and let the pent-up air hiss out

through his nostrils. No, not now. Too dangerous and too unsatisfactory somehow. David undressed, blew out the lamp and climbed into his own bed. Tired though he was, it took him a long time to fall into an uneasy sleep.

(iii)

The next opportunity for killing the doctor came three days later. They had spent the intervening time scrambling about near the top of Mount Olympus, systematically quartering the curved plateau. David went mechanically about the tasks he was given, only half-listening to the doctor's suggestions and theories. As far as he could tell, the idea was that prehistoric people would revere the tallest mountain on the island as a kind of phallic symbol. As the ascent to the top must always have been easy, logic hinted that the summit might well have become a special worshipping ground. The doctor also believed that the early inhabitants of Cyprus, like most prehistoric people, would have been sun-worshippers. As at Stonehenge, it was possible that they had evolved some ritual on the spot where the sun's rays first touched the summit at sunrise. The obvious answer was to get up early, reach the summit just before dawn and note the area lit up when the sun first showed over the eastern horizon.

It was Gerda who, with a woman's practicality, pointed out that the spot would vary according to the seasons. If the rites had been held at one particular time of the year, not in midsummer as it now was, they could be very far out in their search. But the doctor took this objection in his stride. He decided to search the ground over the whole eastern side of the mountain. And so they had risen at dawn and waited shivering on the silent summit until the red glare in the east turned to gold and the sun's rim cut the misty horizon. Doctor Andersen marked the place with a

stake and then they spent the rest of the day, with a short break for a picnic lunch, scouring the area in widening circles, prodding the turf and investigating any boulders that might have been piled up by a human hand.

In the course of his search David came to the edge of the mountain. On all other sides it sloped away gently but here a natural fault in the ground made an almost sheer drop for perhaps a hundred feet. Having nothing better to do and wanting to appear conscientious, he lay down and peered over the edge. The surface sloped inwards, away from him. Leaning over, he thought he could see a darker shadow about a third of the way down the dark wall of rock. He looked again; it seemed to be an opening, perhaps a natural crevice or perhaps a man-made cave.

Standing up, he called to the doctor who was peering at the ground some twenty yards away. Gerda was out of sight; her beat took her in a wide circle over the northern slope. Doctor Andersen marked the place he had reached by driving a peg into the turf and then came over.

‘Would you have a look at this, sir?’ David asked. ‘It may be nothing but I’d like you to see it.’

Doctor Andersen lay down beside him on the cliff-edge and peered down.

‘There,’ said David, ‘follow the line of my arm. Just this side of where that bit of rock juts out. Can you see what I mean? It’s like a dark shadow but if you look closely, it might be an opening in the rock.’

The doctor nodded. ‘David, I think you’ve found something. That could be very interesting. The trouble with the top of the mountain—unless it’s changed a great deal in the last few thousand years and I can’t believe that is so—is that there is nothing to focus the sun’s rays, no natural promontory. These prehistoric rites must have had a touch of the dramatic in order to appeal to savage minds. I had hoped for, say, a large, pointed rock on the

summit, something that would catch the sun's first rays in an obvious way. But there's nothing like that up here. That could be the alternative. A cave or a natural hollow in the mountainside, a place that would be difficult to get at so that the priests kept it as their secret preserve and carried out their sacrifices mysteriously away from the common people. And a cave or a hole would focus the sun's rays, if the sun happened to play a part in the rites. Would you think the sun will ever reach that spot?

David looked up at the sky. 'I should say so. Not much before midday perhaps and then only for a short time because the overhang we're lying on would throw a shadow down there once the sun was overhead.'

'Excellent,' said the doctor. 'That's almost better than I could have hoped for. I must go down and have a look at the place.'

'Go down?' David echoed. 'You'd never make it. The cliff slopes inwards. Even if there are places to grip, you'd never hang on.'

Doctor Andersen scrambled to his feet. 'We have a good coil of stout rope,' he said. 'Here's a convenient rock. We could tie one end round this and drop the other end over. It's more than long enough and it's tested up to a thousand pounds pressure. I don't weigh a sixth of that. You may not think it but I've done plenty of rock climbing. It's just a question of holding the rope in your hands and letting yourself down gently by walking with your feet against the side of the cliff. Rather like a fly,' he added.

'How about getting back?'

'That's easy too. If the rope's long enough—and it should be—I could go on down to the bottom the same way and walk back round the side of the mountain. Or climb back up the rope. If the worst came to the worst, a hefty fellow like you, David, could haul me up.'

'Let me go instead,' David suggested. 'I saw it first.'

'No, the first descent must be mine.' He looked keenly at David who suddenly realized that it was a matter of pride with him. If anything exciting were to be discovered, the driving force of the expedition must be first on the spot to make the discovery.

'Okay,' he shrugged. 'But I don't know what Gerda will think when she finds out her uncle is risking his neck like this.'

'No risk,' replied the doctor shortly. 'Besides, you'll be here to keep an eye on things.'

He was uncoiling the rope as he spoke. Suddenly David saw a double meaning in that last remark. His throat went dry at the implication. This might be a golden opportunity. David swallowed and slid his tongue, that seemed to have grown too big for his mouth, over his lips.

The doctor tested a boulder that happened to lie embedded in the turf a few feet from the edge. It might have been David's imagination but the boulder appeared to shift slightly when the doctor leaned all his weight against it. But he seemed satisfied and looped the rope over it, knotting it quickly and professionally. He walked to the edge and tossed over the loose end of the rope, watching to see where it dropped. It hung quite close to the opening in the mountainside.

Doctor Andersen wiped the palms of his hands against his trousers. 'I shan't be gone more than a few minutes this first time,' he said. 'You'll be able to watch me most of the way down. I don't think there'll be anything for you to do but if I run into any difficulties—which I'm sure I shan't—but just in case I do, I'll give two sharp tugs on the rope. Is that clear? Two sharp tugs. That'll be the signal for you to start hauling me up.'

David nodded. He could hardly trust himself to speak.

Then he came out with, 'Won't you tie the rope round your waist? It might be a bit safer that way.'

'Oh, this is perfectly safe anyway. And the rope would only get tangled up if I tied myself to it. Don't look so concerned, David. I've done this hundreds of times before—in many worse places.' He squatted on the edge of the cliff and lowered his legs, groping for a foothold. Having found one, he then gripped the rope with both hands in turn and eased himself over until only his shoulders and head were in sight. With a nod and a smile to David he slid out of view.

The rope was strained taut. It had settled near the base of the boulder and it creaked as the doctor's full weight came on it. David jerked his head down at the noise. The boulder had definitely slipped a little, he thought. There was a tiny puff of dust near its base and the earth in which it was embedded looked raw. He walked quickly over to the edge of the cliff and peered down. The doctor was already ten feet or more down, his grey head bent to look at the surface of the rock. He must have become aware of David's presence for he craned his neck to look up. Their eyes met. The doctor nodded to show he was all right and then bent down to watch his progress once more.

David moved back to the boulder. Cautiously he pressed against it. Yes, it certainly moved a fraction of an inch. Now was the moment. One hard shove. That was all. He clenched his teeth and began to force his hands against the stone. It felt rough and cold to his grasp. Bunching his shoulders he began to heave.

'David, where's Uncle?'

He spun round at the sound of Gerda's voice. She was standing thirty yards away, half-hidden by the slope in the ground. His open mouth made an involuntary noise as the breath left him. He swallowed and shouted huskily, 'Lord, you made me jump. Creeping up like that. Your

uncle's climbing down the cliff. We may have found something.'

She walked nearer. 'You've got such a guilty look, David. You sure you haven't pushed him over?'

He managed a smile. 'But of course. I'm just doing what's known as haunting the scene of the crime. Fooling apart, I'm not too happy about this rock, the rope's tied to. It doesn't look too firm.'

She hurried over to the place. 'Oh, David, Uncle's just like a child when he gets an idea into his head. He shouldn't take these risks.'

'I know. I wanted to go down myself but he wouldn't let me. If there's anything to be discovered, he wants to be the one who discovers it.'

'Well, he must come back at once. It's too dangerous.' She looked over the edge.

'Don't call out to him, Gerda. That's the worst thing to do. He might lose his concentration if he hears a shout. Where's he got to?'

'He's not in sight. The rope's hanging loose. Oh, David, he hasn't fallen, has he?'

'Nonsense. Of course not.' David looked over the edge, down to the pointed rocks at the base. There was nothing to be seen. 'He must be in the cave we spotted. That's why he's let the rope go loose. Don't panic, child. He'd have yelled if he'd fallen and anyway there'd be a large stain on those rocks down there if he'd landed in a hurry.'

'Darling, you have the most macabre sense of humour. He's my uncle, don't forget.'

'Sorry. For a moment you had me going.'

'How will he get back? Oh, he is an old idiot, risking his neck at his age.'

'Getting back will be easier than going down. It always is in climbing. The only thing I don't like is this rock he's

hitched the rope so. It wouldn't be funny if that came loose and it looked a bit wobbly just now. I tell you what, you keep watch over the edge and I'll get a grip on the rope to take the strain when he starts back.'

'And then if the rock gives, he'll go down and pull you over with him. I'm beginning to wish we were back in Kyrenia, heat or no heat.'

'Frankly, so do I.'

'Let's try to persuade him to go back, shall we?' said Gerda.

'We can try but what's the use? He's going to stick to this damned mountain like a limpet till he's found something.'

Just then there was a double tug on the rope and David, coiling the slack around his waist, like the anchor man in a tug o' war team, took the strain. In barely half a minute, Doctor Andersen scrambled into sight over the edge. There were dust-marks on his face and his hands were grimy.

'I do not know what to think,' he said. He was panting and he slumped down on the turf beside them. 'It is very dark and, need I say, very dirty. By the smell something died there not so long ago. Perhaps a wild goat that managed to scramble down somehow and then starved to death because it was trapped. I struck a few matches but could not really see anything of interest. The cave goes back several feet but there has obviously been a fall of rock that blocks the inside. I thought I saw carvings on the inner wall of the rock but the light from the match was not very clear. The marks I saw could have been natural ones.'

'Shall I have a go now, sir?' David asked.

'No, thank you, David. I propose we have our sandwiches now and after that, if you don't mind, I'd like to have another try. I know just what to look for now, you

see, and I think it would save us all time in the long run if I go ^{gain}. After that, it will be your turn.'

'Well, if we're going to make many trips, I suggest we find something safer than that rock to tie the rope round. It seemed to give a bit when you were half-way down.'

'Yes, I thought I felt a sudden slackening of the tension at one moment. There was no harm done, anyway, but I think you are right. After lunch we'll find a safer anchor.'

'And spend the rest of our holiday going up and down like a yo-yo,' Gerda muttered to David as they walked over to fetch the picnic basket.

But she was wrong. The same afternoon Doctor Andersen tripped over a loose boulder on the easy slope of the mountain and badly sprained his right ankle. David and Gerda between them managed to support him back to the cabin at Troodos. A local Cypriot doctor was called in and he applied cold compresses, saying that no bones were broken but that the injured leg must be rested for several days. As there was little point in staying on at Troodos with the leader of the party immobilized, David drove them back to Kyrenia next morning in his station waggon. Doctor Andersen was a good patient and in spite of the jolting his leg received on the bumpy mountain roads he never complained. David, easing the big car round the downhill bends, thought that although the doctor did not know it, he was lucky to be travelling back to the plains in an upright position, in spite of the accident.

(iv)

An uneasy week followed. David divided his time between Nicosia and Kyrenia, tugged this way and that by conflicting emotions. He managed to avoid Hassau most of the time but when they did occasionally meet he

noticed a mocking, calculating look in the Turk's piggy little eyes. So Hassan was wondering whether he had the guts to go through with the job, was he? He'd damn soon show him. But no opportunity presented itself. Doctor Andersen was confined to the hotel and spent all day sitting on the balcony with his bandaged ankle propped up on cushions. He also must have been chafing at the enforced inactivity for he had lapsed into a silent sombre mood, spending all his time deep in some thick volume or gazing blankly out to sea, lost in thought. There were moments when David had almost decided to call it off and get away from the island abruptly without saying good-bye to anyone. A clean break and a fresh start elsewhere might be the real answer. But every afternoon he was drawn, almost in spite of himself, over to Kyrenia. He had to keep seeing Andersen, tormenting himself with the opposing wishes of wanting to kill him and wanting to spare him, as the tongue continues to probe a sore tooth, increasing the pain but never able to leave it alone.

• And of course there was Gerda. He no longer felt entirely at ease in her company but he could not go without it. The strain of having to hide his real motive for staying in Cyprus grew greater and he had always to be on the alert against a slip of the tongue or a spontaneous gesture that might betray him. Never a practised actor, David was now always tense in her company and inclined to be irritable. They quarrelled from time to time, brief antagonisms that flared up over some petty difference and then died down in a fervent reconciliation. But anxiety smouldered away under the surface and it needed only a puff of teasing or a thoughtless word to set the quarrel aflame once more. David tried to explain to her that the thought of his impending departure from Cyprus was the cause and she apparently accepted that excuse. But

their earlier delight in each other's company seemed to have gone.

Something's got to happen, he thought to himself, after a week of see-sawing emotions. He would have to do something about it—soon. He happened to be driving back to Nicosia from Kyrenia and had reached the opening to the pass across the side of the mountain range. The road was narrow and steep at this point. It jinked round a right-angle bend, ran straight for some some twenty yards or so and then bent away again in the opposite direction around another sharp corner. To the left there was a drop down to the valley, the slope was rough with rocks and tangled bushes. To the right there was a high wall of stone, where the road had been blasted out of the living rock; the mountainside seemed to overhang the road, as though to push it over into space. Away to the right but hidden behind the jut of the shelf of rock was the ruined castle of St. Hilarion, perched on the highest point of the mountain range.

Perfect spot for an ambush, David thought idly and then he stiffened. He drove on slowly for a short distance and pulled the station waggon off the road by the entrance of the rough track that led up to St. Hilarion. He got out and began to walk up the track. Half-way up he struck off the path and scrambled across rocky gullies until he was looking down on the Kyrenia road. It was a perfect spot for an ambush. Anyone lying here with a rifle could not be seen from the mountain range behind for he would be in dead ground. There was a custodian for St. Hilarion castle who lived in a small wooden hut near the base. But that was more than half a mile away and the man would have to stay inside the tumbled castle wall to keep an eye on visitors. And even if visitors happened to drive up the rough track at the time, they could see nothing of these rocks. There were no buildings in sight on the northern

slope of the mountain running down to Kyrenia and the monastery of Bellapaise was a couple of miles away to the east, hidden behind the intervening olive groves. On the other side of the valley the mountain range continued, climbing in one bound from the plain. The distant mountain top was uninhabited and no casual passer-by up there could spot a movement among the gullies on this side. The spot might have been tailor-made for an ambush, he thought. Andersen had to drive along the road to Nicosia at least twice a week in a hired car, on his way to the hospital to have his ankle dressed. This time it would be a fool-proof attempt.

So he arranged for Hassan to get him a sniper's rifle with a telescopic sight. He reached his rendezvous and waited for the hired car to bring Andersen into range. It arrived within a minute of the expected time and he took careful aim. He was just squeezing the trigger past first pressure when a flock of goats erupted across the road in front of him, followed by the goatherd. He dared not risk a shot while the goats were milling round the car which, in the confusion, crept on up the road and out of sight. David lowered the rifle and cursed his luck, grinding the toe of his right boot against the rocky path, as though he were grinding it into the doctor's face. When his rage passed, he felt weak and drained of vitality. He could not go on screwing up his nerve to kill in cold blood only to be thwarted by sheer bad luck. Perhaps he was not meant to kill the man? He wondered about this as he slouched back up the mountain path, tucking the loaded, useless rifle under his arm.

He raced back across the mountain range to the lonely bay a few miles west of Kyrenia, where he had parked the station waggon out of sight behind a clump of carob trees. Remembering the appointment with Gerda that was to have been his alibi, he drove to the hotel, hoping

she would not spot the fact that he had not come direct from Nicosia. He invented a convenient puncture to excuse his lateness and then drove back along the road with her, but this time to Snake Island. They sat on the beach. The sun beat the white sand into an eye-aching dazzle; they both put on dark glasses and lay back as the heat of the sun seemed to press against them. Even the sand underneath the bath towel they lay on felt hot through the material. They were drenched by the urgent sunshine.

After several minutes of drowsy silence, David said, 'How about a swim? It's probably like bath water but it may be cooler than here.'

Gerda stretched. 'I don't think I will but you go ahead.'

'You won't have a swim? Aren't you feeling well? You usually spend so long in the water that once or twice I've had a good look to make sure you haven't got webbed feet. What's the matter, sweetheart?'

'As a matter of fact, I don't feel very well.'

'Oh, darling, I am sorry. Is it a headache or something? I could dash back to the hotel and fetch some aspirins.'

'That's sweet of you, David, but it's not a headache.'

'What is it then? Or shouldn't I ask?'

She said nothing for perhaps half a minute. She had scooped up a handful of the fine, silvery sand and was letting it trickle from one hand to the other. All her concentration seemed to go into the trivial action. Then at last she said, 'Do you remember we sat almost in this very spot one night a month ago? The first time we went swimming together in the moonlight. Do you remember?'

'Remember? How could I ever forget?'

She dropped the handful of sand and stroked his arm. 'Nice David,' she said. 'So gallant.'

'I'm not being gallant. I meant it. I'll never forget that night.'

'Well, do you remember anything you said?'

'Ah, now you've probably caught me. I said quite a lot, if I remember. Anyway, why use it in evidence against me now?'

'I'll tell you what you said. You said that nothing ever went wrong the first time.' She looked at him but he could not see the expression in her eyes behind the dark glasses.

'Yes, well——' he began to say and then the truth dawned on him. 'Oh, darling, you're not—but in a way, that's wonderful. Now you really will have to marry me.'

She clung to him. 'Oh, David, you're wonderful. If you'd known what was coming next, you couldn't have said anything better. I'm beginning to think I love you after all.'

'I should damn well hope so. Carrying my brat around—you'd just better love me or else. But you're quite sure, are you?'

'Almost. Of course, it could be a false alarm but somehow I don't think so. What are you grinning about?'

'I'm just thinking that now head office will have to let me stay on here for a while. I'll wire them today to tell them I'm getting married. They'd have to give me at least three weeks' leave for that.'

'Not so fast, darling. I haven't accepted you yet.'

'You will, my pet, you will. Like it or not, you haven't much choice, now have you?'

'Revealing yourself in your true colours already, David, are you? My mother always said I'd marry a brute.'

'You say the nicest things. That's part of your fatal fascination for me. Let me see now, we'll get your uncle's consent—that should be a walkover——'

'A walkover? What does that mean? You aren't going to tread on poor Uncle, are you?'

'No, sweetheart, I wouldn't hurt him for the world.'

Walkover means it's easy, there'll be no opposition. When you're playing a game and your opponent decides not to take part, he gives you what we call a walkover. Stick around and I'll learn you to talk English as she is spoke. Reverting to what I was saying before I was rudely interrupted. I'll get your uncle's consent, then we can be married by special licence and take a prolonged honeymoon, making our way back to Sweden in easy stages. Then we can decide where we'll settle down—there or in England. If it's to be Sweden, you'll have to teach me your benighted language and get some of your own back. I'm not quite sure what we'll use for money but if you've got any, we can always live on that.'

'David, my pet, you'd better cover your head with a towel. I've never heard you ramble on like this before. Of course, it may be delayed shock.'

'It's a very nice shock, whatever it is.'

'Listen to me for a moment, please, darling. Let's do nothing for a few days. Oh, don't look alarmed—I'm going to marry you anyway. But in two or three days at the most we'll know the truth one way or the other. If something has happened, then a few days will make no difference and we'll get married just as soon as we can. But if nothing's happened, then I'd prefer to get properly engaged and wait some months before we marry. I'm the last of the family who hasn't left home and my mother would want me to get married from her home, with a proper wedding dress and all the usual ceremony. She'd feel cheated if she weren't there to cry over me.'

'So getting married is really for your mother's benefit, is it?'

'No, of course not, darling. But do see it my way, please. If we have to get married in a hurry, of course we will. But let's wait a couple of days and see what happens first.'

'All right, I'll be generous while the fancy is on me. I'll be doubly generous in fact. Let's see, today is Tuesday, isn't it? You have till this time Saturday morning, four whole days, to see what happens, as you put it. Then we either get married right away or we get married in a few months' time. And, in the latter event, I'm relying on you not to spin it out too much. Now your uncle's got this bad foot, he won't want to hang around in Cyprus much longer. It's up to you to persuade him to start heading for home, understand? The sooner the better.'

'Yes, David,' she said with apparent meekness.

'This has been quite a day,' he said. 'I'm feeling too excited to sit still. Would you forgive me if I went in for a swim—that is if you won't come?'

'No, David, I'll stay here if you don't mind. But you go and have a swim.'

'Well said. You'll have to take special care of the two of you from now on.'

She scooped up some sand and flung it at him. 'Sometimes you say the horriest things. And sometimes the nicest.'

'That's me all over. Keep 'em guessing's my motto. I shan't be long.'

He ran down the beach and plunged into the tepid sea, striking out vigorously for the island. He felt exultant. Events had taken the decision for him. Now that Gerda was pregnant—and he was sure she was—they could get married and he could take her far away from her uncle. The latter could go in peace, as far as he was concerned. He felt a momentary pang of contrition for Sterner whom he would have let down but then he shrugged his way through the waves. Sterner had given him an unnatural task anyway. You could hardly expect a man to kill a stranger, not even a stranger but someone he liked and respected, in cold blood. Thank God for that herd of goats

earlier this morning. It would have been bitter irony to have got his shot in and killed the uncle—cousin, was it?—of the girl he was now going to marry. Oh yes, things were turning out well. Only four days and he'd know what the future held. Either way he won. It would be wonderful to get away from an atmosphere of hate and suspicion, thinking out every move ahead and tensing yourself to kill someone. Oh hell, that reminded him. He'd forgotten to tell Hassan that he had failed again. It was going to be worth a lot to see his face when he was told that the hired assassin had quit.

David laughed and shook the salt drops from his face. He felt strong and tireless as he thrust on towards the island.

(v)

That evening he had dinner with Gerda and Doctor Andersen at their hotel. Beforehand he had wondered whether it would be hard to keep the news hidden from the doctor or at any rate to keep him from guessing that something was up. But the doctor was obviously excited about some news of his own. The quiet lethargy of the last week had left him and he chatted away volubly over dinner, teasing Gerda and cracking jokes in his old style. When Gerda took a second helping of ice-cream he bantered her about her appetite, saying that she was getting fat. David's eyes caught hers in a quick glance and then they both looked down. Doctor Andersen was fortunately too occupied with his own good humour to notice anything and the incident passed off. When they left the dining-table to return to the private balcony, David saw that the doctor was hardly limping at all on his bad ankle.

As they drank their coffee, Doctor Andersen helped himself to brandy and then lit a thin black cigar. David

wondered what could be the matter with him. He was normally so abstemious and almost a non-smoker but here he was, drinking and puffing away at the pungent cigar, in the best of spirits. Just then the doctor leant forward and tapped him on the knee.

'David,' he said, 'would you like to be present at the birth of a great discovery?'

When he heard the word 'birth' David started slightly, then relaxed at the rest of the sentence. 'Of course,' he said. 'I've always wanted to get my name into the history books.'

'Perhaps you will, David, perhaps you will. But if you don't mind, it'll probably be books on archæology. The Andersen-Flint discoveries—how does that sound?'

'Why not the Flint-Andersen discoveries?' Gerda suggested.

'Oh no, Andersen-Flint,' said David. 'Age before honesty. Sorry, sir,' he added quickly, 'that's just a joke.'

'Well, whatever it's called,' the doctor went on, 'this time I may have hit on something quite interesting.'

• 'Do tell us.'

'If Gerda promises not to interrupt me with fatuous remarks, I will. You remember the legend of Aphrodite rising from the waves on the west coast of Cyprus? It has become embedded in the history of the place so that Cyprus is often known as the Island of Love and one of the local wines is even called Aphrodite. Now, as you know, my overall theory is that there is a sensible, logical explanation for all these old legends, a natural explanation which must have been unknown to the people who started the legends so that they could only explain a strange event by turning to the supernatural.'

'Here ends the first lesson,' Gerda murmured.

'That's enough from you, niece. One more interruption and off you go to bed.'

‘Sorry, Uncle.’ She winked at David.

‘Where was I? Oh yes, the Aphrodite legend. A possible answer came to me and I began to make discreet inquiries to see if there were any facts to support it. I have found out something promising. I must not call it more than that at present but it is most promising. First of all, let us suppose that something did happen all these years ago to make onlookers think that a goddess had dramatically risen from the sea near the west coast of the island. Now what could give rise to the story? Perhaps a big fish, let us say a dolphin, got trapped in the shallows and began to thrash about, churning up the water. From a distance this might look like a human form. Don’t forget that the gods were always imagined in human shape. But then I thought that this could not be the explanation. The folk living on the coast would have been fishermen. They would be familiar with the shape and size of all the fishes likely to frequent the waters near the island. It might have been some strange fish, a whale perhaps or a shark, but there is no record of such creatures ever being found in the Mediterranean. So I discarded this explanation. But I was still positive that there must be some natural answer. Then a vague idea struck me. This morning, while in Nicosia, I went along to the Secretariat and got permission to look up the records. And the facts I learned there seem to bear out my new theory.’

‘Do hurry up and get to the point, Uncle.’

‘Certainly. It is this. Every few years, at certain times, the fishermen sailing off the west coast north of Paphos report a strange disturbance in the sea. The reports vary, which is natural enough, but they all have something in common. In a particular spot the sea is calm one moment and the next it begins to froth and revolve, rather like a whirlpool. Sometimes a spout of water is flung up. Ten years ago a small fishing boat happened to be almost on the

spot when the sea began to behave in this strange manner. The boat was tipped over and all the occupants drowned. In fact none of the local fishermen will sail or row over this particular part of the sea nowadays. The more superstitious apparently say that it is sacred and the goddess punishes those who are impious enough to desecrate the place where she rose from the waves. Now do you see what I am getting at?

'I'm beginning to,' David said.

'The secret is to try to put yourself into the mind of some ignorant peasant thousands of years ago. You believe that the gods exist, that they can be cruel and capricious. You happen to be standing near the sea-shore, looking out to sea. It may be a moonlight night and everything is still and quiet. Then suddenly, before your very eyes, something seems to emerge from the sea. The waters bubble and thrash and something tall and white and cylindrical appears, waving and changing its shape with froth flying off it. To the modern scientist it would be a water-spout but to you, imagining yourself as a primitive, untaught peasant, it could be the goddess Aphrodite herself in all her naked, blazing glory. And so you fling yourself to the ground and cover your eyes, for fear of being struck blind for your presumption in gazing on the naked goddess. Minutes pass and when you at last dare to steal a look, the sea is calm and peaceful again. The goddess must have gone ashore. And so you run home like the wind and gasp out your story to your family who mutter it to their friends and they pass it on to their friends. And so a legend is born.'

'Bravo, Uncle, bravo,' cried Gerda, clapping her hands. 'Didn't he tell it well, David? With your imagination and gift for words, you really ought to write a book, Uncle.'

David said, 'I must say it sounds reasonable enough.'

‘Thank you,’ said Doctor Andersen. There was an unusual flush in his cheeks and his eyes were bright. ‘If you’re agreeable, David, I suggest we drive over to the exact spot on the coast early tomorrow and hire a small boat. The place in question is only about half a mile out to sea and I believe the water is very clear just there. There must be some kind of underground stream that emerges just there or some kind of current so that, when the wind is blowing in a certain direction and other conditions are just right, a whirlpool is formed. By the way, can you row a boat, David?’ •

‘Sort of. Enough to get us out half a mile and back anyway.’

‘Splendid. Would you like to come?’

‘I’d love to. What about Gerda?’

‘There’d hardly be room for her in a small rowing boat, and, besides, she’s not feeling very well, are you, dear?’ he said. ‘Not that you’d notice anything wrong from her appetite,’ he added with a smile.

‘Oh, I’m all right,’ Gerda said. ‘It’s just a touch of the sun. A quiet day indoors will put me right. Somehow I don’t fancy tossing about in a small boat all day. By the way, what happens if the whirlpool starts up when you are right on the spot? I don’t want to find myself stranded in Cyprus all on my own.’

‘That’s most unlikely. This is the wrong time of the year.’

‘Well, do take care of yourselves. David, it’s up to you to keep a careful eye on him. And don’t rock the boat. He’s not a good swimmer, are you, Uncle?’

‘Don’t worry,’ David said. ‘I’ll look after both of us.’

‘And make sure you wear some warm things, Uncle,’ she went on. ‘It may be very hot on shore but you’ll find there’s quite a breeze when you get out some way. And you don’t want to catch a chill on the stomach again.’

'I promise to wrap myself in cotton-wool from head to toe,' Doctor Andersen said.

'Then anyone watching from the shore will see something all white and think that Aphrodite has called in again,' David observed. 'Who knows? We may start another legend as well as solve the old one.'

Doctor Andersen smiled. 'I suggest we start as early as we can. How soon could you get here in the morning, David?'

'Six to half past. Would that be all right?'

'Yes, fine. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go off to bed now. It'll be a long day tomorrow.'

David did not stay long after the doctor had gone to bed. He sat for a short while, gently holding Gerda in his arms and occasionally kissing her. His earlier mood of exultation had changed into a warm glow of contentment. Everything was working out so well.

He called soon after six o'clock next morning. Doctor Andersen was ready and waiting for him on the hotel steps when he drew up. There was no sign of Gerda who was still fast asleep, the doctor told him. David would have liked to say good morning to her, to kiss her awake and see the sleepy look on her face turn, he hoped, to pleasure at the sight of him. But his companion was anxious to get on and, as soon as he had carefully placed a black box with a handle—which held his scientific instruments, he said—on to a back seat, Doctor Andersen climbed in beside David and off they went.

The sun was already up but its rays were not yet oppressively hot. The hedges and grass verges that unreeled past the station waggon as it raced along were sparkling with dew. The air smelt fresh and clean. David gulped it in as he drove; there was something exhilarating about driving fast in the clear early morning.

For a short while they chatted about the doctor's latest

theory and David listened while his passenger explained what evidence he hoped to find to bear it out. He had obviously been reading up the subject for his conversation was full of nautical terms. David found himself catching something of the enthusiasm he generated. It would be exciting if they could establish the real answer to the legend. And even if the trip was another wild-goose chase like the Tloodos expedition, there were worse ways of spending a day than rowing a small boat on a calm sea.

They lapsed into a companionable silence. David found himself thinking about the man sitting beside him. Could this gentle, quiet man who was always diffident except when enthusing on one of his archæological projects really be the sadistic Knelle? It seemed incredible. Perhaps Sterner had made a mistake after all. Or, more likely, he might indeed be Knelle but was not really guilty of the crimes of which he had been accused. The evidence of prisoners of war was notoriously unreliable, especially when they were ill. They often became neurotic and imagined that treatment given for their own well-being, was secretly meant to hurt them and make them worse. It could be that Knelle had genuinely done his best for the patients in his care, including young Sterner, and had been falsely accused of engineering the deaths of those whom he had been unable to save. If that were so and he had got wind of the news that he was likely to be prosecuted for war-crimes, it was the most natural thing in the world for him to make a getaway while he could. It was logical to expect that the tribunals of a conquering enemy would find all the accused guilty irrespective of the evidence. Not all foreigners had the same high opinion of British justice as the British themselves held. So who could blame a man if he decided not to risk the vagaries of the courts and slipped away to assume a false identity? In this case flight

was not synonymous with guilt; it was merely a form of prudence.

Yes, thought David, as they turned south towards their goal, that could be the answer. Besides, whether it was true or not, he was going to marry Gerda, not her whole family. They could settle down in England and probably never see the doctor again. She was not responsible for her relatives' shortcomings and they might soon have their own family responsibilities to think about. He wondered whether she really were pregnant or not. Somehow he could not imagine himself in the role of a father. As an orphan and an only child, he had never come into close touch with babies. They were things that made a noise when they were pushed in prams round the park by adoring mothers or smug nannies. He supposed that you could get used to them and, besides, sooner or later they had to grow up. After all these years of solitariness, it might be fun to have a family of his own, to grow some roots at last and turn into a staid suburban husband. Whatever the future might hold, as long as he had Gerda he would be happy. He began to hum 'Lily Marlene' as he drove.

Doctor Andersen looked up from his reverie. 'Where did you learn that song?' he asked.

'Oh, it was a great favourite with the British Army, sir. Our chaps in the desert picked it up from the Afrika Korps and it soon caught on until the Army more or less adopted it.'

'I knew it was German but I never realized that the English took it up. I shall never understand your people, David, never. They are either the greatest nation on earth—or the greatest hypocrites.'

'Hypocrites, I should think,' David murmured.

'There, your very remark is typical. Always depreciating themselves, shrugging off their achievements with an

understatement. Incapable of hating the people they fought against and yet able to commit the grossest misdeeds in the name of justice.'

'You mean the Nuremberg trials? Yes, they were rather a poor do. A lot of us didn't like the way they were carried out. But I think the Germans, if they'd won, would have done the same—and worse,' he added slyly.

'Perhaps. But the Germans are a logical race. They would hardly have pretended that they were doing the whole world and generations to come a favour in trying and executing the defeated war leaders. That is where the hypocrisy comes in. It is understandable and logical to strike the head off the snake that bit you. But not to pretend that justice demands you do it almost against your will.'

'Well, logic doesn't seem to have got the Germans anywhere, does it, sir? Look at the mess they're in now.'

'They'll come back, David. They have the will and the ability to get strong again. Disaster will only spur them on. In a very few years they will be a force to respect.'

He lapsed into silence and David was not anxious to resume the fruitless argument. To hell with the Germans, he thought. He had his own future to consider and a pleasant prospect it was.

After another hour's driving, they reached a small village near the west coast of the island, their destination. They ate the sandwiches Doctor Andersen had brought and then drove on to a spot within a hundred yards of the sea. David parked and locked the station waggon. Then they walked to the one small café in the village, which was only a strip of whitewashed cottages on either side of the road. There were rocky hills rising almost immediately behind it, merging with the wooded slopes of the mountain range. A few scrawny goats cropped the turf on the

hillside. Fishing nets were hung up to dry across the whitened walls of the houses.

David stood by idly while the doctor haggled with a swarthy little Cypriot whose bristly face carried three or four days' growth of beard. He spoke almost no English, so that the bargaining for the hire of a boat was conducted mostly in signs, clorugs and head-shakings, and pointing fingers. The Cypriot kept on waving a grubby hand out towards the sea, then turning down the corners of his mouth and shaking his head.

'He's warning us against rowing out there,' Doctor Andersen remarked. 'I think he's trying to tell us it's dangerous.'

'The old legend at work, eh?' David said. 'He's probably an expert salesman just working up the price.'

At last, after a great deal of signalled argument, the bargain was struck. The Cypriot was to charge them two pounds for the hire of the boat and they were to pay a further deposit of five pounds which would be refunded when the boat was returned.

'What does he think we're doing?' David asked. 'Trying to buy the *Queen Mary*? What's the betting that he pockets the fiver and takes to the hills? I should have thought a fiver would buy the whole fishing fleet round here, caiques and all.' He smiled at the Cypriot and said, 'You're wasting your talents here, chum, you'd be a great hit on the Stock Exchange.'

Not understanding a word but seeing that the visitor smiled at him, the little man flashed his eyes and teeth in a big grin.

'Well may you smile,' said David. 'It's not every day a pair of wealthy suckers fall into your lap.'

The Cypriot conducted them the few yards down to the strip of beach and pointed to the boat that was drawn up just out of the water. It was a clumsy, wooden affair about

twelve feet long with high sides and roughly carved rowlocks. David gave it a critical glance. 'Hardly suitable for the Boat Race,' he commented, 'though the colours are almost right.' The outside of the boat was painted a bright blue, the Greek national colour. 'It doesn't look too safe to me,' he added. 'The slightest wave and it'll rock like a rocking-horse! I hope you're a good sailor, sir.'

Doctor Andersen nodded absent-mindedly. He had taken a folded map out of a pocket and was studying it. David saw that a line had been pencilled on it connecting a point on the coast with a mark on the blank area of the sea. Alongside were pencilled figures. The doctor put down the map and then delved into his pocket for a prismatic compass which he held up to his eye. 'A bearing of two hundred and fifty-six degrees,' he said. 'That takes us past the headland over there. That should be easy. We only have to steer as close to the headland as we can and then go on beyond it for some'—he glanced at the map—'six or seven hundred yards. It looks even more promising on the actual ground than on the map.' He put away the compass and map, then pulled some money out of an inside pocket. 'We'll just settle up and then we can be on our way.'

'Let me do this, sir,' David said, and reached for his money.

'No, I insist, David. This is my affair. Besides, you have spent too much already on taking Gerda out with you. Please put your money away. This was my idea and I insist on paying for it.'

The Cypriot grabbed the pound notes and thrust them inside his open shirt.

'The deposit'll need fumigating when you get it back,' David commented. Together the three of them shoved the boat into the water. The beach must have shelved away abruptly for the boat floated easily. David scrambled in

first and unshipped the oars, then Doctor Andersen climbed in and sat near the stern while the Cypriot held the boat back. Once they were settled, he shoved them off. He watched David's erratic course as he got accustomed to the long, clumsy oars, then shrugged his shoulders and walked away up the beach.

David pulled away steadily in long sweeps. Once he was used to the weight of the oars and the rocking of the high-sided boat he began to enjoy the rhythm. The sun shone on the glassy surface of the sea and lit the drops of spray on the oars into diamonds. The headland to the left of the boat, an abrupt, boulder-strewn cliff, flung a shadow across their path. Here the sea was almost purple shot through with green glints as it lifted uneasily at the foot of the cliff. Beyond the dark shadow it was pale green, an eerie, iridescent mass of colour that gradually turned to blue in the deeper water beyond the headland. David watched the changing colours in fascination as he heaved on the oars. Doctor Andersen sat on the wooden plank that ran across the stern, concentrating on the prismatic compass he held in one hand. The other clutched the black box at his feet. From time to time he called out a slight change of direction but otherwise he said nothing.

David was quite content to row on in silence. He had fallen into a tranquil mood. Everything turned out for the best, he was thinking. At the time he had been desperate, angry and yet strangely relieved, at the failure of his two attempts to kill the doctor. It would have been bitterly ironic if he had succeeded. He knew now that he was not cut out for that kind of job. Killing in wartime was one thing when the heat of the moment combined with a carefully induced frame of mind. But you had to possess an unnatural mental streak of sadism to track down and kill a man, however ripe for death he might be, in peacetime when there were no psychological tensions to tighten your

nerve to the desperate point. Thank the Lord he had discovered this in time.

He had rowed for nearly twenty minutes when the doctor signalled him to halt. Thankfully he shipped the oars and stretched his shoulders and arms where the muscles were beginning to ache with the unaccustomed exercise. A trickle of sweat was running down between his shoulder-blades, making his back itch. He rubbed the spot and then trailed his hands, already sore and cramped at tugging on the heavy oars, in the sea alongside the boat. A shoal of minnows, inquisitively nosing at the strange object above them, turned tail in unison and darted off. They shone golden in the sunlight that penetrated the clear water to a depth of several feet. Peering down through the lambent sea David could pick out vague shadows which might be rocks on the sea-bed. He calculated that the sea must be some thirty feet deep at this point. It seemed to be lit up from within, so clear was the water in the light of the sun. He watched the shadows bending and distorting as the boat rocked.

The doctor broke into his reverie. 'Have you got your swimming trunks on underneath your clothes?' he asked.

David said, 'Yes. You asked me to bring them.'

'Well, then, we may as well start now. If my theory is the right one, somewhere near here there should be a spring—a fresh-water one, perhaps—emerging from the sea-bed. Or there may be some malformation in the structure of the sea-bed. A chasm of some sort, it may be. Do you think you could dive down and find out for me, David?'

'Of course.' He began to peel off his shirt. The early morning sun warmed his shoulders comfortingly.

'How long can you stay underwater, David?'

He thought for a moment. 'A minute, I suppose. It

rather depends how much swimming about I've got to do once I'm on the bottom. Yes, I reckon I could manage a minute.'

'Don't stay down too long the first time,' said the doctor. 'I may have to ask you to dive down several times, so please don't over-tire yourself this first attempt.'

David grinned as he tugged his slacks down over his feet. He breathed in and out deeply half a dozen times. Then he stood up at the stern of the boat, said 'Here goes', and plunged in.

The water roared in his ears as he struck towards the bottom. His eyes were open and he could see the opaque, golden mass of water around him, lit by the shafts of the sun. As he went further down, the sea appeared to grow colder and darker. At last he saw the sea-bed tilting up towards his face. Crabwise, he swam a few yards in each direction, occasionally patting the sandy bed. The passage of his body made the sand swirl up lazily, obscuring his vision. He could find nothing out of the ordinary and already his pounding heart and red glints before his eyes warned him that he had been under long enough. Squatting on the sea-bed, he thrust himself up towards the light, watching for the shadow of the boat in case he should come up underneath it.

He broke surface about four yards away. He sucked air greedily into his strained lungs. Then, dashing the water from his eyes, he swam three strokes and gripped the side of the boat with his left hand. He was still panting with his exertions.

His wrist was caught in a firm grasp. He looked up and saw the doctor looming over him. Doctor Andersen had seized his left wrist in one hand; in the other he held a hypodermic needle, poised inches away from David's bare fore-arm. The doctor's face was a mask of hate.

David said 'Christ' and involuntarily tore his wrist free. He flung himself away from the boat and said, 'What the hell's wrong?'

Andersen recovered his balance, lost through jabbing down with the hypodermic. He looked steadily at David.

'I was too slow,' he said. 'I should have calculated that your wrist would be wet and slippery.'

'What in God's name are you saying?' David asked. 'Have you gone crazy? If it's a joke, I don't see it.' He was treading water, still panting from his exertion and the sudden shock of the incident.

'Twice you have tried to kill me, David,' said the doctor. 'Once at Troodos and once on the way to Nicosia the other day. I am not a fool, you know. I could see your rifle sticking out from the rocks. Why should you try to kill me? I ask myself. We have never met before this. There can only be one answer. Someone has paid you to kill me. The reason—someone has found out who I really am. Is that not so?'

David looked at the hard face above him and saw that it was useless to bluff. 'Yes,' he said, 'that's right. I did try twice, I admit, but can't you see—I'm in love with Gerda. For her sake, if nothing else, I wouldn't want to hurt you now.'

'So you say, David, but I cannot take the risk.' He spoke almost pleadingly. 'Whether you would try again or not doesn't alter things. Alive, you are a terrible danger to me. You have got to die, I am afraid.'

'You're crazy—you'd never get away with it.'

'No? During the war we discovered anaesthetics that leave almost no trace in the body. Certainly, nothing that the local police could detect. An injection from this—he touched the hypodermic—and you would be unconscious almost at once. You then drown and I take your body

back to the shore, saying that you stayed under too long. It would be almost painless for you,' he added, as if reassuring a nervous patient.

'You'd never get away with it,' David repeated. 'Do you think killing me is going to stop my employer from hunting you down wherever you go? You made a mistake there, you know. It was safe enough to experiment on Poles and gipsies but when you got on to R.A.F. officers with wealthy fathers, you made one big mistake. You made another mistake just now by not holding my arm tightly enough. What are you going to do—come in and get me?'

'I will ask you the same question. What are you going to do, David? It is a long way to the shore and you are not a very good swimmer, Gerda tells me.'

'Another mistake,' David mocked him. 'Just watch me.'

It was a relief to resolve the nightmarish situation in some form of action. He began to swim in a long detour round the boat, heading towards the land. Over his shoulder he could see the doctor's face distorted with hate as he delicately laid down the hypodermic and picked up the clumsy oars. He began to manoeuvre the boat in vicious jerks towards David, zigzagging towards his prey.

David swam on until the high prow loomed over him. Then he rolled sideways under the boat, grabbing at its slippery side. He heaved and thrust his body upwards, pulling the bows of the boat in a half-circle. It rocked and toppled sideways. The doctor yelped as he was pitched out. David sprang at him, bundling him in a rigger tackle away from the boat. As they went down, David gulped in air and drove the heavy body before him, down and down, through the clear water until his lungs were bursting and red sparks glowed before his eyes. He broke free

and swung up to the surface, breaking water in a blinding dazzle. He sucked in a lungful of air and saw the upturned boat a few yards away. Three strokes brought him to it. He clung with one hand and peered into the disturbed depths of the sea.

The doctor's grey head broke the surface ten feet away. He spluttered and gave a high-pitched scream, waving his arms frantically. David flung himself across the dividing space and crashed the man under the surface again. He kept clear of the flailing arms, grasping his enemy round the neck from behind. Down they went in a tumble of twisting limbs, down through the limpid water that churned around them. Knelle struggled madly, clawing at David's hands. But his efforts were useless, his struggles more feeble. For the best part of half a minute David held him under until his own lungs were aching with the strain. Then he pivoted, drawing up his knees. Using the doctor's body as a springboard, he kicked himself up towards the surface, inexorably driving his enemy down to the shadowy depths.

This time it was some seconds before Knelle came up. When he did, his face was chalky white, the eyes glazed and the slack mouth hanging open, belching sea-water. He seemed to look in David's direction, blindly seeking help. The grey hair hung like seaweed around his brow and he made a feeble gesture with one limp hand. David's determination was about to waver; he was almost ready to haul him to safety. But then he remembered the wicked glint of the hypodermic. Once more he sprang at the doctor, bearing him away below the surface. This time there were no struggles. His body went down like a weighted sack. David forced him down until the sand on the sea-bed stirred in clouds around them. He pushed himself free and struck upwards. He broke surface and made for the upturned boat, clinging to it as he panted

himself back to normal breathing. Ceaselessly he looked from side to side, waiting for the next move. Minutes went by. The doctor's body stayed below.

David retched. He watched the threads of vomit curling and twisting away from the boat. Tired out and weak, he managed to drag himself half across the hull and lay there without moving. After many minutes his strength came back. He was tempted to leave the boat where it was and swim back to the shore but he knew that he would never make it. At last after several efforts he managed to rock and pull the boat upright again and then he flopped down into the foot of water still inside it, too weak to move. Once more he waited till some of his strength returned. Standing up with an effort, he saw that both the oars had floated away, luckily in the same direction. Gingerly, he slipped out into the sea and swam slowly across the fifty-yard gap between them and himself. Using them as a support he managed to struggle back to the boat. It wallowed deep in the sea through the weight of water on board. David scooped enough out with his hands to make it ride more easily. He was cold and, finding his wet jacket, wedged under a thwart, he tugged it on. Then he unshipped the oars and slowly, painfully, began to row back. His muscles felt like limp string and the oars like lead bars. In erratic zigzags the boat crept towards the shore.

This was the end, he told himself. He had done the job he had set out to do and done it successfully. The perfect crime—death in a boating accident. But circumstances had thrust it on him in self-defence. There was no merit in it. And he had lost Gerda for ever. That was finished. There was no going back to her, having killed her relative. He could not face a life of deception, guarding his tongue and his actions for ever more, lying warm at night beside the girl whose cousin he had killed. He could not face the

puzzled look in those candid eyes that would bore into him until he finally confessed the truth. That was ended, too.

At last the boat ran ashore, with a grinding of pebbles. He climbed out wearily, half-stumbling on the strangely motionless beach until a strong hand gripped his arm. A cluster of Cypriot villagers crowded round him, silent and wary. He pushed his way through them until he saw the blue uniform of a Cypriot police constable.

'You speak English?' he asked.

The man nodded, looking at him with bright, curious eyes.

David swallowed and said loudly, 'There has been an accident. My—my friend fell overboard. I tried to save him but no luck. I will give you a full report later but first I must make a telephone call. There is a telephone here?'

The constable nodded again. His eyes never left David's face. 'This way,' he said.

He walked up to the row of cottages and ushered David into a neat, bare room. There was a bench against one wall and a table. On a shelf against the wall stood an old-fashioned telephone. The constable bowed slightly and walked out. David noticed that he left the door ajar and stood just outside. His long black shadow fell across the threshold.

David asked for a Nicosia number. As he waited he could feel his wet jacket clinging to his body, still heavy with salt water. He drew a sodden packet of cigarettes from a pocket, crushed it in his hand and flung it in disgust into a corner. At last the Nicosia operator answered and put his call through.

'It's Mr. Flint here,' he said through the crackling. 'I want to speak to Mr. Hassan. At once, please. It's very urgent.'

The line went blank, and then there was a click. 'Is that you, Mr. Flint?' asked a high-pitched voice.

'Yes, it's me, Hassan. Listen carefully. I can't say too much: I'm speaking from a village north of Paphos—I forget the name. I've been out boating with Doctor Andersen but a terrible thing has happened. He fell overboard and I couldn't save him. He's been drowned.' Lies, more bloody lies, he thought. They never end in this game.

'Why, I congratulate you heartily, Mr. Flint. How very clever of you.'

'Don't say too much, you fool,' said David in an urgent whisper. 'We may be overheard.'

The imperturbable falsetto voice went on in his ear. 'This is good news indeed. Mr. Sterner will be so pleased. I'll cable him at once. No doubt we shall be seeing you soon. It would be indiscreet to celebrate the event just yet but once the inquest is over, we might have a little quiet celebration. By then, of course, your money will have arrived.'

'Blood money.'

'Please don't take it so hard. You are entitled to it for doing what you were asked to do—and I imagine doing it well. Frankly, Mr. Flint, I can now tell you that at one time I didn't think you had it in you. There was a time, indeed, not long ago, when I thought—and how I misjudged you—that you were going to throw your hand in. Still, everything comes out well in the end.'

'Oh, go to hell,' said David wearily and he slammed the earpiece back on its hook. He slouched out of the open door and stood for a moment looking out to sea. It was so calm and blue, the same sea that he and Gerda had swum in, had made love beside; the sea that now rocked the dead body of her cousin, clutching it in the depths until the gases bloated the corpse and, buoyant, it rose to

the surface. The game was over. But the fideless sea would always be there, blue and uncaring and horribly lovely. ‘ ‘ ‘

He crushed his hand over his eyes and then turned to the Cypriot constable. ‘This is what happened,’ he said.